

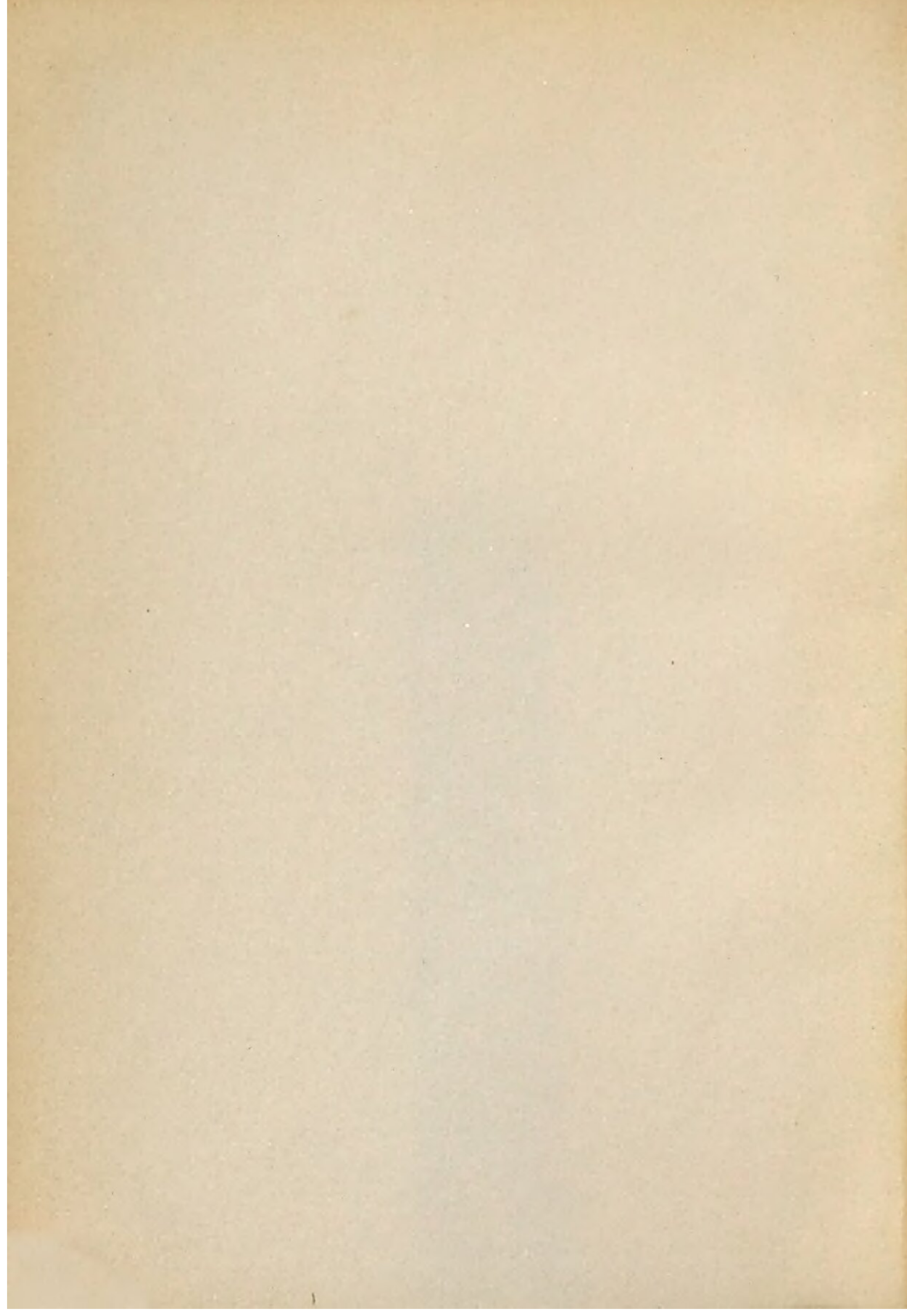


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ILLUMINATION

OR

THE DAMNATION OF THERON WARE

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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1896.



ILLUMINATION.

PART III.

NOTAMING

IN 1932

ILLUMINATION.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN the lingering dusk finally settled down upon this long summer evening, the train bearing the Soulsbys homeward was already some score of miles on its way, and the Methodists of Octavius had nearly finished their weekly prayer-meeting.

After the stirring events of the revival, it was only to be expected that this routine, home-made affair should suffer from a reaction. The attendance was larger than usual perhaps, but the proceedings were spiritless and tame. Neither the pastor nor his wife was present at the beginning, and the class-leader, upon whom control devolved, made but feeble headway against the spell of inertia which the hot night air laid upon the gathering. Long pauses intervened between the perfunctory praise-offerings and supplications, and the hymns weariedly raised from time to time fell again in languor by the wayside.

Alice came in just as people were beginning to hope that someone would start the Doxology, and bring matters to a close. Her appearance apparently suggested this to the class-leader, for in a few moments the meeting had been dismissed, and some of the members on their way out were shaking hands with their minister's wife, and expressing the polite hope that he was better. The worried look in her face and the obvious stains of recent tears upon her cheeks imparted an added point and fervour to these inquiries; but she replied to all, in tones of studied tranquillity, that, although not feeling well enough to attend prayer-meeting, Brother Ware was steadily recovering strength, and confidently expected to be in complete health by Sunday. They left her, and could hardly wait to get into the vestibule to ask one another in whispers what on earth she could have been crying about.

Meanwhile Brother Ware improved his convalescent state by pacing slowly up and down under the elms on the side of the street opposite the Catholic church. There were no houses here for a block and more; the side-walk was broken in many places, so that passers-by avoided it; the overhanging boughs shrouded it all in obscurity; it was pre-eminently a place to be alone in.

Theron had driven to the depôt with his guests an hour before, and, after a period of pleasant waiting on

the platform, had said good-bye to them as the train moved away. Then he turned to Alice, who had also accompanied them in the carriage, and was conscious of a certain annoyance at her having come. That long familiar talk of the afternoon had given him the feeling that he was entitled to bid farewell to Sister Soulsby—to both the Soulsbys—by himself.

“I am afraid folks will think it strange, neither of us attending the prayer-meeting,” he said, with a suggestion of reproof in his tone, as they left the station-yard.

“If we get back in time I’ll run in for a minute,” answered Alice, with docility.

“No, no,” he broke in. “I’m not equal to walking so fast. You run on ahead and explain matters, and I will come along slowly.”

“The hack we came in is still there in the yard,” the wife suggested. “We could drive home in that. I don’t believe it would cost more than a quarter, and if you’re feeling badly——”

“But I am *not* feeling badly,” Theron replied, with frank impatience; “only I feel—I feel that being alone with my thoughts would be good for me.”

“Oh, certainly, by all means!” Alice had said, and turned sharply on her heel.

Being alone with these thoughts, Theron strolled aimlessly about, and did not think at all. The shadows

gathered, and fireflies began to disclose their tiny gleams among the shrubbery in the gardens. A lamp-lighter came along and passed him, leaving in his wake a straggling double line of lights, glowing radiantly against the black-green of the trees. This recalled to Theron that he had heard that the Town Council lit the street lamps by the Almanac, and economised gas when moonshine was due. The idea struck him as droll, and he dwelt upon it in various aspects, smiling at some of its comic possibilities. Looking up in the middle of one of these whimsical conceits, the sportive impulse died suddenly within him. He realised that it was night, and that the massive black bulk reared against the sky on the other side of the road was the Catholic church. The other fact, that he had been there walking to and fro for some time, was borne in upon him more slowly. He turned and resumed the pacing up and down with a still more leisurely step, musing upon the curious way in which people's minds all unconsciously follow about where impulses and intuitions lead.

No doubt it was what Sister Soulsby had said about Catholics which had insensibly guided his purposeless stroll in this direction. What a woman that was! Somehow the purport of her talk—striking, and even astonishing, as he had found it—did not stand out so clearly in his memory as did the image of the woman herself. She must have been extremely pretty once.

For that matter, she still was a most attractive-looking woman. It had been a genuine pleasure to have her in the house—to see her intelligent, responsive face at the table—to have it in one's power to make drafts at will upon the fund of sympathy and appreciation, of facile mirth and ready tenderness, in those big eyes of hers. He liked that phrase she had used about herself—"a good fellow." It seemed to fit her to a "t." And Soulsby was a good fellow too. All at once it occurred to him to wonder if they were actually married.

But really that was no affair of his, he reflected. A citizen of the intellectual world should be above soiling his thoughts with mean curiosities of that sort, and he drove the impertinent query down again under the surface of his mind. He refused to tolerate, as well, sundry vagrant imaginings which rose to cluster about and literalise the romance of her youth which Sister Soulsby had so frankly outlined. He would think upon nothing but her as he knew her—the kindly, quick-witted, capable, and charming woman who had made such a brilliant break in the monotony of life at that dull parsonage of his. The only genuine happiness in life must consist in having bright, smart, attractive women like that always about.

The lights were visible now in the upper rooms of Father Forbes' pastorate across the way. Theron paused

for a second to consider whether he wanted to go over and call on the priest. He decided that mentally he was too fagged and flat for such an undertaking. He needed another sort of companionship—some restful, soothing, human contact, which should exact nothing from him in return, but just take charge of him, with soft, wise words and pleasant plays of fancy, and jokes and—and—something of the general effect created by Sister Soulsby's eyes. The thought expanded itself, and he saw that he had never realised before—nay, never dreamt before—what a mighty part the comradeship of talented, sweet-natured, and beautiful women must play in the development of genius, the achievement of lofty aims, out in the great world of great men. To know such women—ah! that would never fall to his hapless lot.

The priest's lamps blinked at him through the trees. He remembered that priests were supposed to be even farther removed from the possibilities of such contact than he was himself. His memory reverted to that horribly ugly old woman whom Father Forbes had spoken of as his house-keeper. Life under the same roof with such a hag must be even worse than—worse than——

The young minister did not finish the comparison, even in the privacy of his inner soul. He stood instead staring over at the pastorate, in a kind of stupor of

arrested thought. The figure of a woman passed in view at the nearest window, a tall figure with pale summer clothes of some sort and a broad summer hat, a flitting effect of diaphanous shadow between him and the light which streamed from the casement.

Theron felt a little shiver run over him, as if the delicate coolness of the changing night air had got into his blood. The window was open, and his strained hearing thought it caught the sound of faint laughter. He continued to gaze at the place where the vision had appeared, the while a novel and strange perception unfolded itself upon his mind.

He had come there in the hope of encountering Celia Madden.

Now that he looked this fact in the face, there was nothing remarkable about it. In truth, it was simplicity itself. He was still a sick man, weak in body and dejected in spirits. The thought of how unhappy and unstrung he was came to him now with an insistent pathos that brought tears to his eyes. He was only obeying the universal law of nature, the law which prompts the pallid spindling sprout of the potato in the cellar to strive feebly toward the light.

From where he stood in the darkness he stretched out his hands in the direction of that open window. The gesture was his confession to the overhanging

boughs, to the soft night breeze, to the stars above, and it bore back to him something of the confessional's vague and wistful solace. He seemed already to have drawn down into his soul a taste of the refreshment it craved. He sighed deeply, and the hot moisture smarted again upon his eyelids, but this time not all in grief. With his tender compassion for himself there mingled now a flutter of buoyant prescience, of exquisite expectancy.

Fate walked abroad this summer night. The street door of the pastorate opened, and in the flood of illumination which spread suddenly forth over the steps and side-walk, Theron saw again the tall form, with the indefinitely light-hued flowing garments and the wide straw hat. He heard a tuneful woman's voice call out "Good-night, Maggie," and caught no response save the abrupt closing of the door, which turned everything black again with a bang. He listened acutely for another instant, and then with long noiseless strides made his way down his deserted side of the street. He moderated his pace as he turned to cross the road at the corner, and then, still masked by the trees, halted altogether in a momentary tumult of apprehension. No—yes—it was all right. The girl sauntered out from the total darkness into the dim starlight of the open corner.

"Why, bless me! is that you, Miss Madden?"

Celia seemed to discern readily enough through the accents of surprise the identity of the tall, slim man who addressed her from the shadows.

"Good evening, Mr. Ware," she said, with prompt affability. "I'm so glad to find you out again. We heard you were ill."

"I have been very ill," responded Theron, as they shook hands and walked on together. He added, with a quaver in his voice, "I am still far from strong. I really ought not to be out at all. But—but the longing for—for—well, I *couldn't* stay in any longer. Even if it kills me, I shall be glad I came out to-night."

"Oh, we won't talk of killing," said Celia. "I don't believe in illnesses myself."

"But you believe in collapses of the nerves," put in Theron, with gentle sadness, "in moral and spiritual and mental break-downs. I remember how I was touched by the way you told me *you* suffered from them. I had to take what you said then for granted. I had had no experience of it myself. But now I know what it is." He drew a long, pathetic sigh. "Oh, *don't* I know what it is!" he repeated gloomily.

"Come, my friend, cheer up," Celia purred at him in soothing tones. He felt that there was a deliciously feminine and sisterly intuition in her speech, and in the helpful, nurse-like way in which she drew his arm

through hers. He leant upon this support, and was glad of it in every fibre of his being.

"Do you remember? You promised—that last time I saw you—to play for me," he reminded her. They were passing the little covered postern door at the side and rear of the church as he spoke, and he made a half halt to point the coincidence.

"Oh, there's no one to blow the organ," she said, divining his suggestion. "And I haven't the key; and, besides, the organ is too heavy and robust for an invalid. It would overwhelm you to-night."

"Not as you would know how to play it for me," urged Theron pensively. "I feel as if good music to-night would make me well again. I am really very ill and weak—and unhappy!"

The girl seemed moved by the despairing note in his voice. She invited him by a sympathetic gesture to lean even more directly on her arm.

"Come home with me, and I'll play Chopin to you," she said, in compassionate friendliness. "He is the real medicine for bruised and wounded nerves. You shall have as much of him as you like."

The idea thus unexpectedly thrown forth spread itself like some vast and inexpressibly alluring vista before Theron's imagination. The spice of adventure in it fascinated his mind as well, but for a shrinking moment the flesh was weak.

"I'm afraid your people would—would think it strange," he faltered, and began also to recall that he had some people of his own who would be even more amazed.

"Nonsense," said Celia, in fine, bold confidence, and with a reassuring pressure on his arm. "I allow none of my people to question what I do. They never dream of such a preposterous thing. Besides, you will see none of them. Mrs. Madden is at the seaside, and my father and brother have their own part of the house. I shan't listen for a minute to your not coming. Come, I'm your doctor. I'm to make you well again."

There was further conversation, and Theron more or less knew that he was bearing a part in it, but his whole mind seemed concentrated, in a sort of delicious terror, upon the wonderful experience to which every footstep brought him nearer. His magnetised fancy pictured a great, spacious parlour, such as a mansion like the Maddens' would of course contain; and there would be a grand piano, and lace curtains, and paintings in gold frames, and a chandelier, and velvet easy-chairs, and he would sit in one of these, surrounded by all the luxury of the rich, while Celia played to him. There would be servants about, he presumed, and very likely they would recognise him, and of course they would talk about it to Tom, Dick, and Harry after-

ward. But he said to himself defiantly that he didn't care.

He withdrew his arm from hers as they came upon the well-lighted main street. He passed no one who seemed to know him. Presently they came to the Madden place, and Celia, without waiting for the gravelled walk, struck obliquely across the lawn. Theron, who had been lagging behind with a certain circumspection, stepped briskly to her side now. Their progress over the soft, close-cropped turf in the dark together, with the scent of lilies and perfumed shrubs heavy on the night air, and the majestic bulk of the big, silent house rising among the trees before them, gave him a thrilling sense of the glory of individual freedom.

"I feel a new man already," he declared, as they swung along on the grass. He breathed a long sigh of content, and drew nearer, so that their shoulders touched now and again as they walked. In a minute more they were standing on the doorstep, and Theron heard the significant jingle of a bunch of keys which his companion was groping for in her elusive pocket. He was conscious of trembling a little at the sound.

It seemed that, unlike other people, the Maddens did not have their parlour on the ground floor, opening

off the front hall. Theron stood in the complete darkness of this hall till Celia had lit one of several candles which were in their hand-sticks on a sort of sideboard next the hat-rack. She beckoned him with a gesture of her head, and he followed her up a broad staircase, magnificent in its structural appointments of inlaid woods, and carpeted with what to his feet felt like down. The tiny light which his guide bore before her half revealed, as they passed in their ascent, tall lengths of tapestry, and the dull glint of armour and brazen discs in shadowed niches on the nearer wall. Over the stair-rail lay an open space of such stately dimensions, bounded by terminal lines of decoration so distant in the faint candle-flicker, that the young country minister could think of no word but "palatial" to fit it all.

At the head of the flight, Celia led the way along a wide corridor to where it ended. Here, stretched from side to side, and suspended from broad hoops of a copper-like metal, was a thick curtain, of a uniform colour which Theron at first thought was green, and then decided must be blue. She pushed its heavy folds aside and unlocked another door. He passed under the curtain behind her, and closed the door.

The room into which he had made his way was not at all after the fashion of any parlour he had ever seen. In the obscure light it was difficult to tell what it

resembled. He made out what he took to be a painter's easel, standing forth independently in the centre of things. There were rows of books on rude, low shelves. Against one of the two windows was a big, flat writing-table—or was it a drawing-table?—littered with papers. Under the other window was a carpenter's bench, with a large mound of something at one end covered with a white cloth. On a table behind the easel rose a tall mechanical contrivance, the chief feature of which was a thick upright spiral screw. The floor was of bare wood, stained brown. The walls of this queer room had photographs and pictures taken apparently from illustrated papers, pinned up at random, for their only ornament.

Celia had lighted three or four other candles on the mantel. She caught the dumbfounded expression with which her guest was surveying his surroundings, and gave a merry little laugh.

"This is my workshop," she explained. "I keep this for the things I do badly—things I fool with. If I want to paint, or model in clay, or bind books, or write, or draw, or turn on the lathe, or do some carpentering, here's where I do it. All the things that make a mess which has to be cleaned up, they are kept out here, because this is as far as the servants are allowed to come."

She unlocked still another door as she spoke—a door which was also concealed behind a curtain.

“Now,” she said, holding up the candle so that its reddish flare rounded with warmth the creamy fulness of her chin and throat, and glowed upon her hair in a flame of orange light—“now I will show you what is my very own.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THERON WARE looked about him with frankly undisguised astonishment.

The room in which he found himself was so dark at first that it yielded little to the eye, and that little seemed altogether beyond his comprehension. His gaze helplessly followed Celia and her candle about as she busied herself in the work of illumination. When she had finished and pinched out the taper there were seven lights in the apartment, lights beaming softly through half-opaque alternating rectangles of blue and yellow glass. They must be set in some sort of lanterns around against the wall, he thought, but the shape of these he could hardly make out.

Gradually his sight adapted itself to this subdued light, and he began to see other things. These queer lamps were placed, apparently, so as to shed a special radiance upon some statues which stood in the corners of the chamber, and upon some pictures which were embedded in the walls. Theron noted that the statues, the marble of which lost its aggressive whiteness under the tinted lights, were mostly of naked men and women;

the pictures, four or five in number, were all variations of a single theme, the Virgin Mary and the Child.

A less untutored vision than his would have caught more swiftly the scheme of colour and line in which these works of art bore their share. The walls of the room were in part of flat upright wooden columns, terminating high above in simple capitals, and they were all painted in pale amber and straw and primrose hues, irregularly wavering here and there toward suggestions of white. Between these pilasters were broader panels of stamped leather, in gently varying shades of softest blue. These contrasted colours vaguely interwove and mingled in what he could see of the shadowed ceiling high overhead. They were repeated in the draperies and huge cushions and pillows of the low, wide divan which ran about three sides of the room. Even the floor, where it revealed itself among the scattered rugs, was laid in a mosaic pattern of matched woods, which, like the rugs, gave back these same shifting blues and uncertain yellows.

The fourth side of the apartment was broken in outline, at one end by the door through which they had entered, and at the other by a broad, square opening, hung with looped-back curtains of a thin silken stuff. Between the two apertures rose against the wall what Theron took at first glance to be an altar. There were pyramidal rows of tall candles here on either side, each

masked with a little silken hood; below, in the centre, a shelf-like projection supported what seemed a massive carved casket, and in the beautiful intricacies of this, and the receding canopy of delicate ornamentation which depended above it, the dominant colour was white, deepening away in its shadows, by tenderly minute gradations, to the tints which ruled the rest of the room.

Celia lighted some of the high thick tapers in these candelabra, and opened the top of the casket. Theron saw with surprise that she had uncovered the keyboard of a piano. He viewed with much greater amazement her next proceeding, which was to put a cigarette between her lips, and, bending over one of the candles with it for an instant, turn to him with a filmy, opalescent veil of smoke above her head.

"Make yourself comfortable anywhere," she said, with a gesture which comprehended all the divans and pillows in the place. "Will you smoke?"

"I have never tried since I was a little boy," said Theron, "but I think I could. If you don't mind, I should like to see."

Lounging at his ease on the Oriental couch, Theron experimented cautiously with the unaccustomed tobacco, and looked at Celia with what he felt to be the confident quiet of a man of the world. She had thrown aside her hat, and in doing so had half released some

of the heavy strands of hair coiled at the back of her head. His glance instinctively rested upon this wonderful hair of hers. There was no mistaking the sudden fascination its disorder had for his eye.

She stood before him, with the cigarette poised daintily between thumb and finger of a shapely hand, and smiled comprehendingly down on her guest.

"I suffered the horrors of the damned with this hair of mine when I was a child," she said. "I dare say all children have a taste for persecuting red heads, but it's a speciality with Irish children. They get hold somehow of an ancient national superstition or legend that red hair was brought into Ireland by the Danes. It's been a term of reproach with us since Brian Boru's time to call a child a Dane. I used to be pursued and baited with it every day of my life, until the one dream of my ambition was to get old enough to be a Sister of Charity, so that I might hide my hair under one of their big, beastly, white linen caps. I've got rather away from that ideal since, I'm afraid," she added, with a droll downward curl of her lip.

"Your hair is very beautiful," said Theron, in the calm tone of a connoisseur.

"I like it myself," Celia admitted, and blew a little smoke-ring toward him. "I've made this whole room to match it. The colours, I mean," she explained, in deference to his uplifted brows. "Between us we make

up what I hope Whistler would call a symphony. That reminds me—I was going to play for you. Let me finish the cigarette first.”

Theron felt grateful for her reticence about the fact that he had laid his own aside. “I have never seen a room at all like this,” he remarked. “You are right; it does fit you perfectly.”

She nodded her sense of his appreciation. “It is what I like,” she said. “It expresses *me*. I will not have anything about me—or anybody either—that I don’t like. I suppose, if an old Greek could see it, it would make him sick, but it represents what *I* mean by being a Greek. It is as near as an Irishman can get to it.”

“I remember your puzzling me by saying that you were a Greek.”

Celia laughed and tossed the cigarette-end away. “I’d puzzle you more, I’m afraid, if I tried to explain to you what I really meant by it. I divide people up into two classes, you know—Greeks and Jews. Once you get hold of that principle, all other divisions and classifications, such as by race, or language, or nationality, seem pure foolishness. It is the only true division there is. It is just as true among negroes or wild Indians, who never heard of Athens or Jerusalem, as it is among white folks. That is the beauty of it. It works everywhere, always.”

"Try it on me," urged Theron, with a twinkling eye. "Which am I?"

"Both," said the girl, with a merry nod of the head. "But now I'll play. I told you you were to hear Chopin. I prescribe him for you. He is the Greekiest of the Greeks. *There* was a nation where all the people were artists, where everybody was an intellectual aristocrat, where the Philistine was as unknown, as extinct, as the dodo! Chopin might have written his music for them."

"I am interested in Shopang," put in Theron, suddenly recalling Sister Soulsby's confidences as to the source of her tunes. "He lived with—what's his name—George something? We were speaking about him only this afternoon."

Celia looked down into her visitor's face, at first inquiringly, then with a latent grin about her lips. "Yes—George something," she said, in a tone which mystified him.

The Rev. Mr. Ware was sitting up, a minute afterward, in a ferment of awakened consciousness that he had never heard the piano played before. After a little he noiselessly rearranged the cushions, and settled himself again in a recumbent posture. It was beyond his strength to follow that first impulse, and keep his mind abreast with what his ears took in. He sighed and lay

back, and surrendered his senses to the mere unthinking charm of it all.

It was the Fourth Prelude that was singing in the air about him—a simple, plaintive strain wandering at will over a surface of steady rhythmic movement underneath, always creeping upward through mysteries of sweetness, always sinking again in cadences of semitones. With only a moment's pause, there came the Seventh Waltz—a rich, bold confusion which yet was not confused. Theron's ears dwelt with eager delight upon the chasing medley of swift, tinkling sounds, but it left his thoughts free.

From where he reclined, he turned his head to scrutinise, one by one, the statues in the corners. No doubt they were beautiful—for this was a department in which he was all humility,—and one of them, the figure of a broad-browed, stately, though thick-waisted woman, bending slightly forward, and with both arms broken off, was decently robed from the hips downward. The others were not robed at all. Theron stared at them with the erratic, rippling jangle of the waltz in his ears, and felt that he possessed a new and disturbing conception of what female emancipation meant in these later days. Roving along the wall, his glance rested again upon the largest of the Virgin pictures—a full-length figure in sweeping draperies, its radiant aureoled head upturned in rapt adoration, its feet resting on a

crescent moon, which shone forth in bluish silver through festooned clouds of cherubs. The incongruity between the unashamed statues and this serene incarnation of holy womanhood jarred upon him for the instant. Then his mind went to the piano.

Without a break, the waltz had slowed and expanded into a passage of what might be church music, an exquisitely modulated and gently solemn chant, through which a soft, lingering song roved capriciously, forcing the listener to wonder where it was coming out, even while it caressed and soothed to repose.

He looked from the Madonna to Celia. Beyond the carelessly drooping braids and coils of hair which blazed between the candles, he could see the outline of her brow and cheek, the noble contour of her lifted chin and full, modelled throat, all pink as the most delicate rose-leaf is pink, against the cool lights of the altar-like wall. The sight convicted him in the court of his own soul as a prurient and mean-minded rustic. In the presence of such a face, of such music, there ceased to be any such thing as nudity, and statues no more needed clothes than did those slow, deep, magnificent chords which came now, gravely accumulating their spell upon him.

"It is all singing!" the player called out to him over her shoulder, in a minute of rest. "That is what Chopin does—he sings!"

She began, with an effect of thinking of something else, the Sixth Nocturne, and Theron at first thought she was not playing anything in particular, so deliberately, haltingly did the chain of charm unwind itself into sequence. Then it came closer to him than the others had done. The dreamy, wistful, meditative beauty of it all, at once oppressed and inspired him. He saw Celia's shoulders sway under the impulse of the *rubato* license—the privilege to invest each measure with the stress of the whole, to loiter, to weep, to run and laugh at will—and the music she made spoke to him as with a human voice. There was the wooing sense of roses and moonlight, of perfumes, white skins, alluring languorous eyes, and then——

“You know this part, of course,” he heard her say.

On the instant they had stepped from the dark, scented, starlit garden where the nightingale sang into a great cathedral. A sombre and lofty anthem arose, and filled the place with the splendour of such dignified pomp of harmony, and such suggestions of measureless choral power and authority, that Theron sat abruptly up, then was drawn resistlessly to his feet. He stood motionless in the strange room, feeling most of all that one should kneel to hear such music.

“This you'll know too—the funeral march from the Second Sonata,” she was saying, before he realised that

the end of the other had come. He sank upon the divan again, bending forward and clasping his hands tight around his knees. His heart beat furiously as he listened to the weird, mediæval processional, with its wild, clashing chords held down in the bondage of an orderly sadness. There was a propelling motion in the thing, a sense of being borne bodily along, which affected him like dizziness. He breathed hard through the robust portions of stern, vigorous noise, and rocked himself to and fro when, as morning breaks upon a storm-swept night, the drums are silenced for the sweet, comforting strain of solitary melody. The clanging minor harmonies into which the march relapses came to their abrupt end. Theron rose once more, and moved with a hesitating step to the piano.

"I want to rest a little," he said, with his hand on her shoulder.

"Whew! so do I," exclaimed Celia, letting her hands fall with an exaggerated gesture of weariness. "The sonatas take it out of one! They are hideously difficult, you know. They are rarely played."

"I didn't know," remarked Theron. She seemed not to mind his hand upon her shoulder, and he kept it there. "I didn't know anything about music at all. What I do know now is that—that this evening is an event in my life."

She looked up at him and smiled. He read un-

suspected tendernesses and tolerances of friendship in the depths of her eyes, which emboldened him to stir the fingers of that audacious hand in a lingering, caressing trill upon her shoulder. The movement was of the faintest, but having ventured it, he drew his hand abruptly away.

"You are getting on," she said to him. There was an enigmatic twinkle in the smile with which she continued to regard him. "We are Hellenising you at a great rate."

A sudden thought seemed to strike her. She shifted her eyes toward vacancy with a swift abstracted glance, reflected for a moment, then let a sparkling half-wink and the dimpling beginnings of an almost roguish smile mark her assent to the conceit, whatever it might be.

"I will be with you in a moment," he heard her say, and while the words were still in his ears she had risen, and passed out of sight through the broad open doorway to the right. The looped curtains fell together behind her. Presently a mellow light spread over their delicately translucent surface—an undulating radiance which gave the effect of moving about among the myriad folds of the silk.

Theron gazed at these curtains for a little, then straightened his shoulders with a gesture of decision,

and turning on his heel, went over and examined the statues in the farther corners minutely.

"If you would like some more, I will play you the Berceuse now."

Her voice came to him with a delicious shock. He wheeled round, and beheld her standing at the piano, with one hand resting, palm upward, on the keys. She was facing him. Her tall form was robed now in some shapeless, clinging drapery, lustrous and creamy and exquisitely soft, like the curtains. The wonderful hair hung free and luxuriant about her neck and shoulders, and glowed with an intensity of fiery colour which made all the other hues of the room pale and vague. A fillet of faint, sky-like blue drew a gracious span through the flame of red above her temples, and from this there rose the gleam of jewels. Her head inclined gently, gravely toward him, with the posture of that armless woman in marble he had been studying, and her brown eyes, regarding him from the shadows, emitted light.

"It is a lullaby—the only one he wrote," she said, as Theron, pale-faced and with tightened lips, approached her. "No—you mustn't stand there," she added, sinking into the seat before the instrument. "Go back and sit where you were."

The most perfect of lullabies, with its swaying abandonment to cooing rhythm, ever and again rising

in ripples to the point of insisting on something, one knows not what, and then rocking, melting away once more, passed, so to speak, over Theron's head. He leaned back upon the cushions, and watched the white, rounded forearm which the falling folds of this strange, statue-like drapery made bare.

There was more that appealed to his mood in the Third Ballade. It seemed to him that there were words going along with it—incoherent and impulsive, yet very earnest words, appealing to him in strenuous argument and persuasion. Each time he almost knew what they said, and strained after their meaning with a passionate desire; and then there would come a kind of cuckoo-call, and everything would swing dancing off again into a mockery of inconsequence.

Upon the silence there fell the pure, liquid, mellifluous melody of a soft-throated woman singing to her lover.

"It is like Heine—simply a love-poem," said the girl over her shoulder.

Theron followed now with all his senses as she carried the Ninth Nocturne onward. The stormy passage, which she banged finely forth, was in truth a lovers' quarrel; and then the mild, placid flow of sweet harmonies into which the *furore* sank, dying languorously away upon a silence all alive with tender memories of sound—was that not also a part of love?

They sat motionless through a minute—the man on the divan, the girl at the piano—and Theron listened for what he felt must be the audible thumping of his heart.

Then, throwing back her head, with upturned face, Celia began what she had withheld for the last—the Sixteenth Mazurka. This strange foreign thing she played with her eyes closed, her head tilted obliquely, so that Theron could see the rose-tinted, beautiful countenance, framed, as if asleep, in the billowing luxuriance of unloosed auburn hair. He fancied her beholding visions as she wrought the music—visions full of barbaric colour and romantic forms. As his mind swam along with the gliding, tricky phantom of a tune, it seemed as if he too could see these visions, as if he gazed at them through her eyes.

It could not be helped. He lifted himself noiselessly to his feet and stole with caution toward her. He would hear the rest of this weird, voluptuous fantasy standing thus, so close behind her that he could look down upon her full, uplifted face—so close that, if she moved, that glowing nimbus of hair would touch him.

There had been some curious and awkward pauses in this last piece, which Theron, by some side cerebration, had put down to her not watching what her fingers did. There came another of these pauses now—an

odd, unaccountable halt in what seemed the middle of everything. He stared intently down upon her statuesque, dreaming face during the hush, and caught his breath as he waited. There fell at last a few faltering ascending notes, making a half-finished strain, and then again there was silence.

Celia opened her eyes and poured a direct deep gaze into the face above hers. Its pale lips were parted in suspense, and the colour had faded from its cheeks.

"That is the end," she said, and with a turn of her lithe body stood swiftly up, even while the echoes of the broken melody seemed panting in the air about her for completion.

Theron put his hands to his face and pressed them tightly against eyes and brow for an instant. Then, throwing them aside with an expansive downward sweep of the arms and holding them clenched, he returned Celia's glance. It was as if he had never looked into a woman's eyes before.

"It *can't* be the end!" he heard himself saying in a low voice charged deep with significance. He held her gaze in the grasp of his with implacable tenacity. There was a trouble about breathing, and the mosaic floor seemed to stir under his feet. He clung defiantly to the one idea of not releasing her eyes.

"How *could* it be the end?" he demanded, lifting

an uncertain hand to his breast as he spoke, and spreading it there as if to control the tumultuous fluttering of his heart. "Things don't end that way!"

A sharp, blinding spasm of giddiness closed upon and shook him while the brave words were on his lips. He blinked and tottered under it as it passed, and then backed humbly to his divan and sat down, gasping a little and patting his hand on his heart. There was fright written all over his whitened face.

"We—we forgot that I am a sick man," he said feebly, answering Celia's look of surprised inquiry with a forced, wan smile. "I was afraid my heart had gone wrong."

She scrutinised him for a further moment with growing reassurance in her air. Then piling up the pillows and cushions behind him for support, for all the world like a big sister again, she stepped into the inner room, and returned with a flagon of quaint shape and a tiny glass. She poured this latter full to the brim of a thick, yellowish, aromatic liquid, and gave it him to drink.

"This Benedictine is all I happen to have," she said. "Swallow it down. It will do you good."

Theron obeyed her. It brought tears to his eyes, but, upon reflection, it was grateful and warming. He did feel better almost immediately; a great wave of comfort seemed to enfold him as he settled himself back on the

divan. For that one flashing instant he had thought that he was dying. He drew a long, grateful breath of relief and smiled his content.

Celia had seated herself beside him, a little away. She sat with her head against the wall and one foot curled under her, and almost faced him.

"I dare say we forced the pace a little," she remarked after a pause, looking down at the floor, with the puckers of a ruminating amusement playing in the corners of her mouth. "It doesn't do for a man to get to be Greek all of a sudden; he must work along up to it gradually."

He remembered the music. "Oh, if I only knew how to tell you," he murmured ecstatically, "what a revelation your playing has been to me! I had never imagined anything like it. I shall think of it to my dying day."

He began to remember as well the spirit that was in the air when the music ended. The details of what he had felt and said rose vaguely in his mind. Pondering them, his eye roved past Celia's white-robed figure to the broad, open doorway beyond. The curtains behind which she had disappeared were again parted and fastened back. A dim light was burning within, out of sight, and its faint illumination disclosed a room filled with white marbles, white silks, white draperies of varying sorts, which shaped themselves, as he looked, into

the canopy and trappings of an extravagantly oversized and sumptuous bed. He looked away again.

"I wish you would tell me what you really mean by that Greek idea of yours," he said, with the abruptness of confusion.

Celia did not display much enthusiasm in the tone of her answer. "Oh," she said, almost indifferently, "lots of things. Absolute freedom from moral bugbears, for one thing; the recognition that beauty is the only thing in life that is worth while; the courage to kick out of one's life everything that isn't worth while; and so on."

"But," said Theron, watching the mingled delicacy and power of the bared arm and the shapely grace of the hand which she had lifted to her face, "I am going to get you to teach it *all* to me." The memories began crowding in upon him now, and the baffling note upon which the mazurka had stopped short chimed like a tuning-fork in his ears. "I want to be a Greek myself, if you're one. I want to get as close to you—to your ideal, that is, as I can. You open up to me a whole world that I had not even dreamt existed. We swore our friendship long ago, you know—and now, after to-night—you and the music have decided me. I am going to put the things out of *my* life that are not worth while; only you must help me, you must tell me how to begin."

He looked up as he spoke, to enforce the almost tender entreaty of his words. The spectacle of a yawn, only fractionally concealed behind those talented fingers, chilled his soft speech and sent a flush over his face. He rose on the instant.

Celia was nothing abashed at his discovery. She laughed gaily in confession of her fault, and held her hand out to let him help her disentangle her foot from her draperies and get off the divan. It seemed to be her meaning that he might continue holding her hand after she was also standing.

"You forgive me, don't you?" she urged smilingly. "Chopin always first excites me, then sends me to sleep. You see how *you* sleep to-night!"

The brown, velvety eyes rested upon him, from under their heavy lids, with a languorous kindliness. Her warm, large palm clasped his in frank liking.

"I don't want to sleep at all," Mr. Ware was impelled to say. "I want to lie awake and think about—about everything all over again."

She smiled drowsily. "And you're sure you feel strong enough to walk home?"

"Yes," he replied, with a lingering, dilatory note, which deepened upon reflection into a sigh. "Oh yes!"

He followed her and her candle down the magnificent stairway again. She extinguished the light in

the hall, and opening the front door, stood with him for a silent moment on the threshold. Then they shook hands once more, and with a whispered good-night parted.

Celia, returning to the blue and yellow room, lighted a cigarette and helped herself to some Benedictine in the glass which Theron had used. She looked meditatively at this little glass for a moment, turning it about in her fingers with a smile. The smile warmed itself suddenly into a joyous laugh. She tossed the glass aside, and holding out her flowing robes with both hands, executed a swinging pirouette in front of the gravely beautiful statue of the armless woman.

CHAPTER XX.

It was apparent to the Rev. Theron Ware, from the very first moment of waking next morning, that both he and the world had changed over night. The metamorphosis, in the harsh toils of which he had been labouring blindly so long, was accomplished. He stood forth, so to speak, in a new skin, and looked about him, with perceptions of quite an altered kind, upon what seemed in every way a fresh existence. He lacked even the impulse to turn round and inspect the cocoon from which he had emerged. Let the past bury the past. He had no vestige of interest in it.

The change was not premature. He found himself not in the least confused by it, or frightened. Before he had finished shaving he knew himself to be easily and comfortably at home in his new state, and master of all its requirements.

It seemed as if Alice, too, recognised that he had become another man, when he went down and took his chair at the breakfast-table. They had exchanged no words since their parting in the dépôt-yard the previous evening—an event now faded off into remote vagueness

in Theron's mind. He smiled brilliantly in answer to the furtive, half-sullen, half-curious glance she stole at him as she brought the dishes in.

"Ah! Potatoes warmed up in cream!" he said, with hearty pleasure in his tone. "What a mind-reader you are, to be sure!"

"I'm glad you're feeling so much better," she said briefly, taking her seat.

"Better?" he returned. "I'm a new being!"

She ventured to look him over more freely upon this assurance. He perceived, and catalogued one by one, the emotions which the small brain was expressing through those shallow blue eyes of hers. She was turning over this, that, and the other hostile thought and childish grievance; most of all, she was dallying with the idea of asking him where he had been till after midnight. He smiled affably in the face of this scattering fire of peevish glances, and did not dream of resenting any phase of them all.

"I am going down to Thurston's this morning, and order that piano to be sent up to-day," he announced presently in a casual way.

"Why, Theron, can we afford it?" the wife asked, regarding him with surprise.

"Oh, easily enough," he replied light-heartedly. "You know they've increased my salary."

She shook her head. "No I didn't. How should

I? You don't realise it," she went on dolefully; "but you're getting so you don't tell me the least thing about your affairs nowadays."

Theron laughed aloud. "You ought to be grateful—such melancholy affairs as mine have been till now," he declared; "that is, if it weren't absurd to think such a thing." Then, more soberly, he explained: "No, my girl, it is *you* who don't realise. I am carrying big projects in my mind—big, ambitious thoughts and plans upon which great things depend. They no doubt make me seem preoccupied and absent-minded, but it is a wife's part to understand, and make allowances, and not intrude trifles which may throw everything out of gear. Don't think I'm scolding, my girl. I only speak to reassure you, and—and help you to comprehend. Of course, I know that you wouldn't willingly embarrass my—my career."

"Of course not," responded Alice dubiously; "but—but——"

"But what?" Theron felt compelled by civility to say, though on the instant he reproached himself for the weakness of it.

"Well—I hardly know how to say it," she faltered, "but it was nicer in the old days, before you bothered your head about big projects, and your career, as you call it, and was just a good, earnest, simple young servant of the Lord. O Theron!" she broke forth

suddenly, with tearful zeal, "I get sometimes lately almost scared lest you should turn out to be a—a *backslider!*"

The husband sat upright and hardened his countenance. But yesterday the word would have had in it all sorts of inherited terrors for him. This morning's dawn of a new existence revealed it as merely an empty and stupid epithet.

"These are things not to be said," he admonished her, after a moment's pause, and speaking with carefully measured austerity. "Least of all are they to be said to a clergyman—by his wife."

It was on the tip of Alice's tongue to retort, "Better by his wife than by outsiders," but she bit her lips and kept the gibe back. A rebuke of this form and gravity was a novelty in their relations. The fear that it had been merited troubled, even while it did not convince, her mind, and the puzzled apprehension was to be read plainly enough on her face.

Theron, noting it, saw a good deal more behind. Really, it was amazing how much wiser he had grown all at once. He had been married for years, and it was only this morning that he suddenly discovered how a wife ought to be handled. He continued to look sternly away into space for a little. Then his brows relaxed slowly, and under the visible influence of melting considerations. He nodded his head, turned to-

ward her abruptly, and broke the silence with laboured amiability.

"Come, come—the day began so pleasantly—it was so good to feel well again—let us talk about the piano instead. That is," he added, with an overture to playfulness, "if the thought of having a piano is not *too* distasteful to you."

Alice yielded almost effusively to his altered mood. They went together into the sitting-room, to measure and decide between the two available spaces which were at their disposal, and he insisted with resolute magnanimity on her settling this question entirely by herself. When at last he mentioned the fact that it was Friday, and he would look over some sermon memoranda before he went out, Alice retired to the kitchen in openly cheerful spirits.

Theron spread some old manuscript sermons before him on his desk, and took down his scribbling-book as well. But there his application flagged, and he surrendered himself instead, chin on hand, to staring out at the rhododendron in the yard. He recalled how he had seen Soulsby patiently studying this identical bush. The notion of Soulsby, not knowing at all how to sing, yet diligently learning those sixths, brought a smile to his mind; and then he seemed to hear Celia calling out over her shoulder, "That's what Chopin does—he sings!" The spirit of that wonderful music came back to him,

enfolded him in its wings. It seemed to raise itself up, a palpable barrier between him and all that he had known and felt and done before. That was his new birth—that marvellous night with the piano. The conceit pleased him, not the less because there flashed along with it the thought that it was a poet that had been born. Yes, the former country lout, the narrow zealot, the untutored slave groping about in the dark after silly superstitions, cringing at the scowl of mean Pierces and Winches, was dead. There was an end of him, and good riddance. In his place there had been born a poet—he spelt the word out now unabashed—a child of light, a lover of beauty and sweet sounds, a recognisable brother to Renan, and Chopin—and Celia!

Out of the soothing, tenderly grateful reverie a practical suggestion suddenly took shape. He acted upon it without a moment's delay, getting out his letter-pad and writing hurriedly:—

“DEAR MISS MADDEN,—Life will be more tolerable to me if before nightfall I can know that there is a piano under my roof. Even if it remains dumb, it will be some comfort to have it here, and look at it, and imagine how a great master might make it speak.

“Would it be too much to beg you to look in at Thurston's, say at eleven this forenoon, and give me the

inestimable benefit of your judgment in selecting an instrument?

"Do not trouble to answer this, for I am leaving home now, but shall call at Thurston's at eleven and wait.

"Thanking you in anticipation, I am——"

Here Theron's fluency came to a sharp halt. There were adverbs enough and to spare on the point of his pen, but the right one was not easy to come at. "Gratefully," "faithfully," "sincerely," "truly"—each in turn struck a false note. He felt himself not quite any of these things. At last he decided to write just the simple word "yours," and then wavered between satisfaction at his boldness, dread lest he had been over bold, and, worst of the lot, fear that she would not notice it one way or the other—all the while he sealed and addressed the letter, put it carefully in an inner pocket, and got his hat.

There was a moment's hesitation as to notifying the kitchen of his departure. The interests of domestic discipline seemed to point the other way. He walked softly through the hall, and let himself out by the front door without a sound.

Down by the canal bridge he picked out an idle boy to his mind, a lad whose aspect appeared to promise intelligence as a messenger, combined with large

impartiality in sectarian matters. He was to have ten cents on his return, and he might report himself to his patron at the book-store yonder.

Theron was grateful to the old bookseller for remaining at his desk in the rear. There was a tacit compliment in the suggestion that he was not a mere customer demanding instant attention. Besides, there was no keeping "Thurston's" out of conversations in this place.

Loitering along the shelves, the young minister's eye suddenly found itself arrested by a name on a cover. There were a dozen narrow volumes in uniform binding, huddled together under a cardboard label of "Eminent Women Series." Oddly enough, one of these bore the title "George Sand." Theron saw there must be some mistake, as he took the book down and opened it. His glance hit by accident upon the name of Chopin. Then he read attentively until almost the stroke of eleven.

"We have to make ourselves acquainted with all sorts of queer phases of life," he explained in self-defence to the old bookseller then, counting out the money for the book from his lean purse. He smiled as he added, "There seems something almost wrong about taking advantage of the clergyman's discount for a Life of George Sand."

"I don't know," answered the other pleasantly. "Guess she wasn't so much different from the rest of 'em, except that she didn't mind appearances. We know about her. We don't know about the others."

"I must hurry," said Theron, turning on his heel. The haste with which he strode out of the store, crossed the street, and made his way toward Thurston's did not prevent his thinking much upon the astonishing things he had encountered in this book. Their relation to Celia forced itself more and more upon his mind. He could recall the twinkle in her eye, the sub-mockery in her tone, as she commented with that half-contemptuous "Yes—George Something!" upon his blundering ignorance. His mortification at having thus exposed his dull rusticity was swallowed up in conjectures as to just what her tolerant familiarity with such things involved. He had never before met a young unmarried woman who would have confessed to him any such knowledge; but then, of course, he had never known a girl who resembled Celia in any other way. He recognised vaguely that he must provide himself with an entire new set of standards by which to measure and comprehend her. But it was for the moment more interesting to wonder what *her* standards were. Did she object to George Sand's behaviour, or did she sympathise with that sort of thing? Did those statues, and the loose-flowing, diaphanous toga and unbound hair, the cigarettes,

the fiery liqueur, the deliberately sensuous music—was he to believe that they signified——?

“Good morning, Mr. Ware. You have managed by a miracle to hit on one of my punctual days,” said Celia.

She was standing on the doorstep, at the entrance to the musical department of Thurston's. He had not noticed before the fact that the sun was shining. The full glare of its strong light, enveloping her figure as she stood, and drawing the dazzled eye for relief to the bower of softened colour close beneath her parasol of creamy silk and lace, was what struck him now first of all. It was as if Celia had brought the sun with her.

Theron shook hands with her, and found joy in the perception that his own hand trembled. He put boldly into words the thought that came to him.

“It was generous of you,” he said, “to wait for me out here, where all might delight in the sight of you, instead of squandering the privilege on a handful of clerks inside.”

Miss Madden beamed upon him and nodded approval.

“Alcibiades never turned a prettier compliment,” she remarked. They went in together at this, and Theron made a note of the name.

During the ensuing half-hour the young minister

followed about even more humbly than the clerks in Celia's commanding wake. There were a good many pianos in the big show-room overhead, and Theron found himself almost awed by their size and brilliancy of polish, and the thought of the tremendous sum of money they represented altogether. Not so with the organist. She ordered them rolled around this way or that, as if they had been so many checkers on a draught-board. She threw back their covers with the scant ceremony of a dispensary dentist opening paupers' mouths. She exploited their several capacities with masterful hands, not deigning to seat herself, but just slightly bending forward and sweeping her fingers up and down their key-boards—able, domineering fingers, which pounded, tinkled, meditated, assented, condemned, all in a flash, and amid what affected the layman's ears as a hopelessly discordant hubbub.

Theron moved about in the group, nursing her parasol in his arms and watching her. The exaggerated deference which the clerks and salesman showed to her as the rich Miss Madden, seemed to him to be mixed with a certain assertion of the claims of good-fellowship on the score of her being a musician. There undoubtedly *was* a sense of freemasonry between them. They alluded continually in technical terms to matters of which he knew nothing, and were amused at remarks of hers which to him carried no meaning whatever. It

was evident that the young men liked her, and that their liking pleased her. It thrilled him to think that she knew he liked her too, and to recall what abundant proofs she had given that here, also, she had pleasure in the fact. He clung insistently to the memory of these evidences. They helped him to resist a disagreeable tendency to feel himself an intruder, an outsider, among these pianoforte experts.

When it was all over Celia waved the others aside and talked with Theron. "I suppose you want me to tell you the truth," she said. "There is nothing here really first-rate. It is always much better to buy of the makers direct."

"Do *they* sell on the instalment plan?" he asked. There was a wistful effect in his voice, which caught her attention.

She looked away, out through the window on the street below, for a moment. Then her eyes returned to his, and regarded him with a comforting, friendly, half-motherly glance, recalling for all the world the way Sister Soulsby had looked at him at odd times.

"Oh, you want it at once, I see," she remarked softly. "Well, this Adelberger is the best value for the money."

Mr. Ware followed her finger, and beheld with dismay that it pointed toward the largest instrument in the room, a veritable leviathan among pianos. The

price of this had been mentioned at \$600. He turned over the fact that this was two-thirds his yearly salary, and found the courage to shake his head.

"It would be too large, much too large, for the room," he explained. "And, besides, it is more than I like to pay—or *can* pay, for that matter." It was pitiful to be explaining such details, but there was no help for it.

They picked out a smaller one, which Celia said was at least of fair quality. "Now leave all the bargaining to me," she adjured him. "These prices that they talk about in the piano trade are all in the air. There are tremendous discounts, if one knows how to insist upon them. All you have to do is to tell them to send it to your house—you wanted it to-day, you said?"

"Yes—in memory of yesterday," he murmured.

She herself gave the directions, and Thurston's people, now all salesmen again, bowed grateful acquiescence. Then she sailed regally across the room and down the stairs, drawing Theron in her train. The hirelings made salaams to him as well; it would have been impossible to interpose anything so trivial and squalid as talk about terms and dates of payment.

"I am ever so much obliged to you," he said fervently, in the comparative solitude of the lower floor.

She had paused to look at something in the book department.

"Of course I was entirely at your service; don't mention it," she replied, reaching forth her hand in an absent way for her parasol.

He held up instead the volume he had purchased. "Guess what that is! You never would guess in this wide world!" His manner was surcharged with a sense of the surreptitious.

"Well, then, there's no good trying, *is there?*" commented Celia, her glance roving again toward the shelves.

"It is a Life of George Sand," whispered Theron. "I've been reading it this morning—all the Chopin part—while I was waiting for you."

To his surprise, there was an apparently displeased contraction of her brows as he made this revelation. For the instant a dreadful fear of having offended her seized upon and sickened him. But then her face cleared, as by magic. She smiled, and let her eyes twinkle in laughter at him, and lifted a forefinger in the most winning mockery of admonition.

"Naughty! Naughty!" she murmured back, with a roguishly solemn wink.

He had no response ready for this, but mutely handed her the parasol. The situation had suddenly grown too confused for words, or even sequent thoughts.

Uppermost across the hurly-burly of his mind there scudded the singular reflection that he should never hear her play on that new piano of his. Even as it flashed by out of sight, he recognised it for one of the griefs of his life; and the darkness which followed seemed nothing but a revolt against the idea of having a piano at all. He would countermand the order. He would—but she was speaking again.

They had strolled toward the door, and her voice was as placidly conventional as if the talk had never strayed from the subject of pianos. Theron with an effort pulled himself together, and laid hold of her words.

“I suppose you will be going the other way,” she was saying. “I shall have to be at the church all day. We have just got a new mass over from Vienna, and I’m head over heels in work at it. I can have Father Forbes to myself to-day, too. That bear of a Doctor has got the rheumatism, and can’t come out of his cave, thank Heaven!”

And then she was receding from view, up the sunlit, busy side-walk, and Theron, standing on the doorstep, ruefully rubbed his chin. She had said he was going the other way, and, after a little pause, he made her words good, though each step he took seemed all in despite of his personal inclinations. Some of the passers-by bowed to him, and one or two paused as if to shake

hands and exchange greetings. He nodded responses mechanically, but did not stop. It was as if he feared to interrupt the process of lifting his reluctant feet and propelling them forward, lest they should wheel and scuttle off in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XXI.

DELIBERATE as his progress was, the diminishing number of store-fronts along the side-walk, and the increasing proportion of picket-fences enclosing domestic lawns, forced upon Theron's attention the fact that he was nearing home. It was a trifle past the hour for his midday meal. He was not in the least hungry; still less did he feel any desire just now to sit about in that library-living-room of his. Why should he go home at all? There was no reason whatever, save that Alice would be expecting him. Upon reflection, that hardly amounted to a reason. Wives, with their limited grasp of the realities of life, were always expecting their husbands to do things which it turned out not to be feasible for them to do. The customary male animal spent a considerable part of his life in explaining to his mate why it had been necessary to disappoint or upset her little plans for his comings and goings. It was in the very nature of things that it should be so.

Sustained by these considerations, Mr. Ware slackened his steps, then halted irresolutely, and after a minute's hesitation, entered the small temperance restaurant be-

fore which, as by intuition, he had paused. The elderly woman who placed on the tiny table before him the tea and rolls he ordered was entirely unknown to him, he felt sure, yet none the less she smiled at him and spoke almost familiarly:

"I suppose Mrs. Ware is at the seaside, and you are keeping bachelor's hall?"

"Not quite that," he responded stiffly, and hurried through the meagre and distasteful repast, to avoid any further conversation.

There was an idea underlying her remark, however, which recurred to him when he had paid his ten cents and got out on the street again. There was something interesting in the thought of Alice at the seaside. Neither of them had ever laid eyes on salt water, but Theron took for granted the most extravagant landsman's conception of its curative and invigorating powers. It was apparent to him that he was going to pay much greater attention to Alice's happiness and well-being in the future than he had latterly done. He had bought her, this very day, a superb new piano. He was going simply to insist on her having a hired girl. And this seaside notion—why, that was best of all.

His fancy built up pleasant visions of her feasting her delighted eyes upon the marvel of a great ocean storm, or roaming along a beach strewn with wonderful marine shells, exhibiting an innocent joy in their beauty.

The fresh sea-breeze blew through her hair, as he saw her in mind's eye, and brought the hardy flush of health back upon her rather pallid cheeks. He was prepared already hardly to know her, so robust and revived would she have become by the time he went down to the dépôt to meet her on her return.

For his imagination stopped short of seeing himself at the seaside. It sketched instead pictures of whole weeks of solitary academic calm, alone with his books and his thoughts. The facts that he had no books and that nobody dreamt of interfering with his thoughts subordinated themselves humbly to his mood. The prospect, as he mused fondly upon it, expanded to embrace the priest's and the Doctor's libraries; the thoughts which he longed to be alone with involved close communion with their thoughts. It could not but prove a season of immense mental stimulation and ethical broadening. It would have its lofty poetic and artistic side as well; the languorous melodies of Chopin stole over his reverie as he dwelt upon these things, and soft azure and golden lights modelled forth the exquisite outlines of tall marble forms.

He opened the gate leading to Dr. Ledsmar's house. His walk had brought him quite out of the town, and up, by a broad, main highway, which yet took on all sorts of sylvan charms, to a commanding site on the hillside. Below, in the valley, lay Octavius, at one end

half hidden in factory smoke; at the other, where narrow bands of water gleamed upon the surface of a broad plain piled symmetrically with lumber, presenting an oddly incongruous suggestion of forest odours and the simplicity of the wilderness. In the middle distance, on gradually rising ground, stretched a wide belt of dense, artificial foliage, peeping through which tiled turrets and ornamented chimneys marked the polite residences of those who, though they neither stoked the furnace fires to the west, nor sawed the lumber on the east, lived in purple and fine linen from the profits of this toil. Nearer at hand, pastures with grazing cows on the one side of the road, and the high weather-stained board-fence of the racecourse on the other, completed the jumble of primitive rusticity and urban complications characterising the whole picture.

Dr. Ledsmar's house, toward which Theron's impulses had been secretly leading him ever since Celia's parting remark about the rheumatism, was of that spacious and satisfying order of old-fashioned houses which men of leisure and means built for themselves while the early traditions of a sparse and contented homogeneous population were still strong in the Republic. There was a hospitable look about its wide verandah, its broad, low bulk, and its big, double front door, which did not fit at all with the sketch of a man-hating recluse that the Doctor had drawn of himself.

Theron had prepared his mind for the effect of being admitted by a Chinaman, and was taken somewhat aback when the door was opened by the Doctor himself. His reception was pleasant enough, almost cordial, but the sense of awkwardness followed him into his host's inner room, and rested heavily upon his opening speech.

"I heard, quite by accident, that you were ill," he said, laying aside his hat.

"It's nothing at all," replied Ledsmar. "Merely a stiff shoulder that I wear from time to time in memory of my father. It ought to be quite gone by nightfall. It was good of you to come, all the same. Sit down, if you can find a chair. As usual, we are littered up to our eyes here. That's it; throw those things on the floor."

Mr. Ware carefully deposited an armful of pamphlets on the rug at his feet and sat down. Litter was indeed the word for what he saw about him. Bookcases, chairs, tables, the corners of the floor, were all buried deep under disorderly strata of papers, diagrams, and opened books. One could hardly walk about without treading on them. The dust, which danced up into the bar of sunshine streaming in from the window as the Doctor stepped across to another chair, gave Theron new ideas about the value of Chinese servants.

"I must thank you, first of all, Doctor," he began,

“for your kindness in coming when *I* was ill. ‘I was sick, and ye visited me.’”

“You mustn’t think of it that way,” said Ledsmar; “your friend came for me, and of course I went. And gladly too. There was nothing that I could do, or that anybody could do. Very interesting man that friend of yours; and his wife too—both quite out of the common. I don’t know when I’ve seen two such really genuine people. I should like to have known more of them. Are they still here?”

“They went yesterday,” Theron replied. His earlier shyness had worn off, and he felt comfortably at his ease. “I don’t know,” he went on, “that the word ‘genuine’ is just what would have occurred to me to describe the Soulsbys. They are very interesting people, as you say—*most* interesting—and there was a time, I dare say, when I should have believed in their sincerity. But of course I saw them and their performance from the inside—like one on the stage of a theatre, you know, instead of in the audience—and—well, I understand things better than I used to.”

The Doctor looked over his spectacles at him with a suggestion of inquiry in his glance, and Theron continued: “I had several long talks with her; she told me very frankly the whole story of her life, and—and it was decidedly queer, I can assure you. I may say to you—you will understand what I mean—that since my talk

with you, and the books you lent me, I see many things differently. Indeed, when I think upon it sometimes, my old state of mind seems quite incredible to me. I can use no word for my new state short of illumination."

Dr. Ledsmar continued to regard his guest with that calm, interrogatory scrutiny of his. He did not seem disposed to take up the great issue of illumination. "I suppose," he said after a little, "no woman can come in contact with a priest for any length of time *without* telling him the 'story of her life,' as you call it. They all do it. The thing amounts to a law."

The young minister's veins responded with a pleasurable thrill to the use of the word "priest" in obvious allusion to himself. "Perhaps in fairness I ought to explain," he said, "that in her case it was only done in the course of a long talk about myself. I might say that it was by way of kindly warning to me. She saw how I had become unsettled in many—many of my former views, and she was nervous lest this should lead me to—to——"

"To throw up the priesthood," the Doctor interposed upon his hesitation. "Yes, I know the tribe. Why, my dear sir, your entire profession would have perished from the memory of mankind if it hadn't been for women. It is a very curious subject. Lots of thinkers have dipped

into it, but no one has gone resolutely in with a search-light and exploited the whole thing. Our boys, for instance, traverse in their younger years all the stages of the childhood of the race. They have terrifying dreams of awful monsters and giant animals of which they have never so much as heard in their waking hours; they pass through the lust for digging caves, building fires, sleeping out in the woods, hunting with bows and arrows—all remote ancestral impulses; they play games with stones, marbles, and so on at regular stated periods of the year which they instinctively know, just as they were played in the Bronze Age, and Heaven only knows how much earlier. But the boy goes through all this, and leaves it behind him—so completely that the grown man feels himself more a stranger among boys of his own place, who are thinking and doing precisely the things he thought and did a few years before, than he would among Kurds or Esquimaux. But the woman is totally different. She is infinitely more precocious as a girl. At an age when her slow brother is still stubbing along somewhere in the neolithic period, she has flown away ahead to a kind of mediæval stage, or dawn of mediævalism, which is peculiarly her own. Having got there, she stays there; she dies there. The boy passes her, as the tortoise did the hare. He goes on, if he is a philosopher, and lets her remain in the dark ages, where she belongs. If he happens to be a fool, which

is customary, he stops and hangs around in her vicinity."

Theron smiled. "We priests——" he said, and paused again to enjoy the words—"I suppose I oughtn't to inquire too closely just where we belong in the procession."

"We are considering the question impersonally," said the Doctor. "First of all, what you regard as religion is especially calculated to attract women. They remain as superstitious to-day, down in the marrow of their bones, as they were ten thousand years ago. Even the cleverest of them are secretly afraid of omens and respect auguries. Think of the broadest women you know. One of them will throw salt over her shoulder if she spills it. Another drinks money from her cup by skimming the bubbles in a spoon. Another forecasts her future by the arrangement of tea-grounds. They make the constituency to which an institution based on mysteries, miracles, and the supernatural generally would naturally appeal. Secondly, there is the personality of the priest."

"Yes," assented Ware. There rose up before him, on the instant, the graceful, portly figure and strong, comely face of Father Forbes.

"Women are not a metaphysical people. They do not easily follow abstractions. They want their dogmas

and religious sentiments embodied in a man, just as they do their romantic fancies. Of course you Protestants, with your married clergy, see less of the effects of this than celibates do, but even with you there is a great deal in it. Why, the very institution of celibacy itself was forced upon the early Christian Church by the scandal of rich Roman ladies loading bishops and handsome priests with fabulous gifts, until the passion for currying favour with women of wealth, and marrying them or wheedling their fortunes from them, debauched the whole priesthood. You should read your Jerome."

"I will, certainly," said the listener, resolving to remember the name and refer it to the old bookseller.

"Well, whatever laws one sect or another makes, the woman's attitude toward the priest survives. She desires to see him surrounded by flower-pots and candles, to have him smelling of musk. She would like to curl his hair, and weave garlands in it. Although she is not learned enough to have ever heard of such things, she intuitively feels in his presence a sort of backwash of the old pagan sensuality and lascivious mysticism which enveloped the priesthood in Greek and Roman days. Ugh! It makes one sick!"

Dr. Ledsmar rose as he spoke, and dismissed the topic with a dry little laugh. "Come, let me show you

round a bit," he said. "My shoulder is easier walking than sitting."

"Have you never written a book yourself?" asked Theron, getting to his feet.

"I have a thing on serpent-worship," the scientist replied, "written years ago."

"I can't tell you how I should enjoy reading it," urged the other.

The Doctor laughed again. "You'll have to learn German, then, I'm afraid. It is still in circulation in Germany, I believe, on its merits as a serious book. I haven't a copy of the edition in English. *That* was all exhausted by collectors who bought it for its supposed obscenity, like Burton's 'Arabian Nights.' Come this way and I will show you my laboratory."

They moved out of the room, and through a passage, Ledsmar talking as he led the way. "I took up that subject, when I was at college, by a curious chance. I kept a young monkey in my rooms, which had been born in captivity. I brought home from a beer-hall—it was in Germany—some pretzels one night, and tossed one toward the monkey. He jumped toward it, then screamed and ran back shuddering with fright. I couldn't understand it at first. Then I saw that the curled pretzel, lying there on the floor, was very like a little coiled-up snake. The monkey had never seen a snake, but it was in his blood to be afraid of one. That

incident changed my whole life for me. Up to that evening I had intended to be a lawyer."

Theron did not feel sure that he had understood the point of the anecdote. He looked now, without much interest, at some dark little tanks containing thick water, a row of small glass cases with adders and other lesser reptiles inside, and a general collection of boxes, jars, and similar receptacles connected with the Doctor's pursuits. Farther on was a smaller chamber, with a big, empty furnace, and shelves bearing bottles and apparatus like a drug-store.

It was pleasanter in the conservatory, a low, spacious structure, with broad pathways between the plants, and an awning over the sunny side of the roof. The plants were mostly orchids, he learned. He had read of them, but never seen any before. No doubt they were curious, but he discovered nothing to justify the great fuss made about them. The heat grew oppressive inside, and he was glad to emerge into the garden. He paused under the grateful shade of a vine-clad trellis, took off his hat, and looked about him with a sigh of relief. Everything seemed old-fashioned and natural and delightfully free from pretence in the big, overgrown field of flowers and shrubs.

Theron recalled with some surprise Celia's indictment of the Doctor as a man with no poetry in his

soul. "You must be extremely fond of flowers," he remarked.

Dr. Ledsmar shrugged his well shoulder. "They have their points," he said briefly. "These are all dioecious here. Over beyond are monoecious species. My work is to test the probabilities for or against Darwin's theory that hermaphroditism in plants is a late by-product of these earlier forms."

"And is his theory right?" asked Mr. Ware, with a polite show of interest.

"We may know in the course of three or four hundred years," replied Ledsmar. He looked up into his guest's face with a quizzical half-smile. "That is a very brief period for observation, when such a complicated question as sex is involved," he added. "We have been studying the female of our own species for some hundreds of thousands of years, and we haven't arrived at the most elementary rules governing her actions."

They had moved along to a bed of tall plants, the more forward of which were beginning to show bloom. "Here another task will begin next month," the Doctor observed. "These are salvias, pentstemons, and antirrhinums, or snap-dragons, planted very thick for the purpose. Humble-bees bore holes through their base, to save the labour of climbing in and out of the flowers, and we don't quite know yet why some hive-bees dis-

cover and utilise these holes at once, while others never do. It may be merely the old-fogey conservatism of the individual, or there may be a law in it."

These seemed very paltry things for a man of such wisdom to bother his head about. Theron looked, as he was bidden, at the rows of hives shining in the hot sun on a bench along the wall, but offered no comment beyond a casual, "My mother was always going to keep bees, but somehow she never got around to it. They say it pays very well, though."

"The discovery of the reason why no bee will touch the nectar of the *Epipactis latifolia*, though it is sweet to our taste and wasps are greedy for it, *would* pay," commented the Doctor. "Not like a blue rhododendron, in mere money, but in recognition. Lots of men have achieved a half-column in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* on a smaller basis than that."

They stood now at the end of the garden, before a small, dilapidated summer-house. On the bench inside, facing him, Theron saw a strange recumbent figure stretched at full length, apparently sound asleep, or it might be dead. Looking closer, with a startled surprise, he made out the shaven skull and outlandish garb of a Chinaman. He turned toward his guide, in the expectation of a scene.

The Doctor had already taken out a note-book and pencil, and was drawing his watch from his pocket. He

stepped into the summer-house, and lifting the Oriental's limp arm, took account of his pulse. Then, with head bowed low, sidewise, he listened for the heart action. Finally, he somewhat brusquely pushed back one of the Chinaman's eyelids, and made a minute inspection of what the operation disclosed. Returning to the light, he inscribed some notes in his book, put it back in his pocket, and came out. In answer to Theron's marveling stare, he pointed toward a pipe of odd construction lying on the floor beneath the sleeper.

"This is one of my regular afternoon duties," he explained, again with the whimsical half-smile. "I am increasing his dose monthly by regular stages, and the results promise to be rather remarkable. Heretofore observations have been made mostly on diseased or morbidly deteriorated subjects. This fellow of mine is strong as an ox, perfectly nourished, and watched over intelligently. He can assimilate opium enough to kill you and me, and every other vertebrate creature on the premises, without turning a hair, and he hasn't got even fairly under way yet."

The thing was unpleasant, and the young minister turned away. They walked together up the path toward the house. His mind was full now of the hostile things which Celia had said about the Doctor. He had vaguely sympathised with her then, upon no special knowledge of his own. Now he felt that his sentiments

were vehemently in accord with hers. The Doctor *was* a beast!

And yet—as they moved slowly along through the garden, the thought took sudden shape in his mind—it would be only justice for him to get also the Doctor's opinion of Celia. Even while they offended and repelled him, he could not close his eyes to the fact that the Doctor's experiments and occupations were those of a patient and exact man of science—a philosopher. And what he had said about women—there was certainly a great deal of acumen and shrewd observation in that. If he would only say what he really thought about Celia, and about her relations with the priest! Yes, Theron recognised now, there was nothing else that he so much needed light upon as those puzzling ties between Celia and Father Forbes.

He paused, with a simulated curiosity about one of the flower-beds. "Speaking of women and religion," he began, in as casual a tone as he could command, "I notice curiously enough, in my own case, that as I develop in what you may call the—the other direction, my wife, who formerly was not especially devoted, is being strongly attracted by the most unthinking and hysterical side of—of our Church system."

The Doctor looked at him, nodded, and stooped to nip some buds from a stalk in the bed.

"And another case," Theron went on—"of course

it was all so new and strange to me—but the position which Miss Madden seems to occupy about the Catholic church here—I suppose you had her in mind when you spoke.”

Ledsmar stood up. “My mind has better things to busy itself with than mad asses of that description,” he replied. “She is not worth talking about—a mere bundle of egotism, ignorance, and red-headed immo-desty. If she were even a type she might be worth considering, but she is simply an abnormal sport, with a small brain addled by notions that she is like Hypatia, and a large impudence rendered intolerable by the fact that she has money. Her father is said to be a decent man. He ought to have her whipped.”

Mr. Ware drew himself erect as he listened to these outrageous words. It would be unmanly, he felt, to allow such comments upon an absent friend to pass unrebuked. Yet there was the courtesy due to a host to be considered. His mind, fluttering between these two extremes, alighted abruptly upon a compromise. He would speak so as to show his disapproval, yet not so as to prevent his finding out what he wanted to know. The desire to hear Ledsmar talk about Celia and the priest seemed now to have possessed him for a long time, to have dictated his unpremeditated visit out here, to have been growing in intensity all the while he pretended to be interested in orchids and bees and the

drugged Chinaman. It tugged passionately at his self-control as he spoke.

"I cannot in the least assent to your characterisation of the lady," he began, with rhetorical dignity.

"Bless me," interposed the Doctor, with deceptive cheerfulness, "that is not required of you at all. It is a strictly personal opinion, offered merely as a contribution to the general sum of hypotheses."

"But," Theron went on, feeling his way, "of course, I gathered that evening that you had prejudices in the matter; but these are rather apart from the point I had in view. We were speaking, you will remember, of the traditional attitude of women towards priests—wanting to curl their hair and put flowers in it, you know—and that suggested to me some individual illustrations, and it occurred to me to wonder just what were the relations between Miss Madden and—and Father Forbes. She said this morning, for instance—I happened to meet her, quite by accident—that she was going to the church to practise a new piece, and that she could have Father Forbes to herself all day. Now that would be quite an impossible remark in our—that is, in any Protestant circles, and, purely as a matter of comparison, I was curious to ask you just how much there was in it. I ask you because, going there so much, you have had exceptional opportunities for——"

A sharp exclamation from his companion interrupted

the clergyman's hesitating monologue. It began like a high-pitched, violent word, but dwindled suddenly into a groan of pain. The Doctor's face, too, which had, on the flash of Theron's turning, seemed given over to un-mixed anger, took on an expression of bodily suffering instead.

"My shoulder has grown all at once excessively painful," he said hastily. "I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me, Mr. Ware."

Carrying the afflicted side with ostentatious caution, he led the way without ado round the house to the front gate on the road. He had put his left hand under his coat to press it against his aching shoulder, and his right hung palpably helpless. This rendered it impossible for him to shake hands with his guest in parting.

"You're sure there's nothing I can do?" said Theron, lingering on the outer side of the gate. "I used to rub my father's shoulders and back. I'd gladly——"

"Oh, not for worlds!" groaned the Doctor. His anguish was so impressive that Theron, as he walked down the road, quite missed the fact that there had been no invitation to come again.

Dr. Ledsmar stood for a minute or two, his gaze meditatively following the retreating figure. Then he went in, opening the front door with his right hand, and carrying himself once more as if there were no such

thing as rheumatism in the world. He wandered on through the hall into the laboratory, and stopped in front of the row of little tanks full of water.

Some deliberation was involved in whatever his purpose might be, for he looked from one tank to another with a pondering, dilatory gaze. At last he plunged his hand into the opaque fluid and drew forth a long, slim, yellowish-green lizard, with a coiling, sinuous tail and a pointed, evil head. The reptile squirmed and doubled itself backward around his wrist, darting out and in with dizzy swiftness its tiny forked tongue.

The Doctor held the thing up to the light, and scrutinising it through his spectacles, nodded his head in sedate approval. A grim smile curled in his beard.

"Yes, you are the type," he murmured to it, with evident enjoyment in the conceit. "Your name isn't Johnny any more. It's the Reverend Theron Ware."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE annual Camp Meeting of the combined Methodist districts of Octavius and Thessaly was held this year in the second half of September, a little later than usual. Of the nine days devoted to this curious survival of primitive Wesleyanism, the fifth fell upon a Saturday. On the noon of that day the Rev. Theron Ware escaped for some hours from the burden of work and incessant observation which he shared with twenty other preachers, and walked alone in the woods.

The scene upon which he turned his back was one worth looking at. A spacious, irregularly defined clearing in the forest lay level as a tennis-court, under the soft haze of autumn sunlight. In the centre was a large, roughly constructed frame building untouched by paint, but stained and weather-beaten with time. Behind it were some lines of horse-sheds, and still farther on in that direction, where the trees began, the eye caught fragmentary glimpses of low roofs and the fronts of tiny cottages, withdrawn from full view among the saplings and underbrush. At the other side of the clearing fully four-score tents were pitched, some grey

and mended, others dazzlingly white in their newness. The more remote of these tents fell into an orderly arrangement of semicircular form, facing that part of the engirdling woods where the trees were largest and their canopy of overhanging foliage was lifted highest from the ground. Inside this half-ring of tents were many rounded rows of benches, which followed in narrowing lines the idea of an amphitheatre cut in two. In the centre, just under the edge of the roof of boughs, rose a wooden pagoda, in form not unlike an open-air stand for musicians. In front of this, and leading from it on the level of its floor, there projected a platform, railed round with aggressively rustic woodwork. The nearest benches came close about this platform.

At the hour when Theron started away there were few enough signs of life about this encampment. The four or five hundred people who were in constant residence were eating their dinners in the big boarding-house, or the cottages, or the tents. It was not the time of day for strangers. Even when services were in progress by daylight the regular attendants did not make much of a show, huddled in a grey-black mass at the front of the auditorium, by comparison with the great green and blue expanses of nature about them.

The real spectacle was in the evening, when, as the shadows gathered, big clusters of kerosene torches, hung high on the trees facing the audience, were lighted,

The falling darkness magnified the glow of the lights, and the size and importance of what they illumined. The preacher, bending forward over the rails of the platform, and fastening his eyes upon the abashed faces of those on the "anxious seat" beneath him, borrowed an effect of Druidical mystery from the wall of blackness about him, from the flickering reflections on the branches far above, from the cool night air which stirred across the clearing. The change was in the blood of those who saw and heard him, too. The decorum and half-heartedness of their devotions by day deepened under the glare of the torches into a fervent enthusiasm, even before the services began. And if there was in the rustic pulpit a man whose prayers or exhortations could stir their pulses, they sang and groaned and bellowed out their praises with an almost barbarous license, such as befitted the wilderness.

But in the evening not all were worshippers. For a dozen miles round on the country-side, young farm-workers and their girls regarded the Camp Meeting as perhaps the chief event of the year, no more to be missed than the county fair or the circus, and offering from many points of view more opportunities for genuine enjoyment than either. Their behaviour when they came was pretty bad, not the less so because all the rules established by the Presiding Elders for the regulation of strangers took it for granted that they would act

as viciously as they knew how. These sight-seers sometimes ventured to occupy the back benches, where the light was dim. More often they stood outside, in the circular space between the tents and the benches, and mingled cat-calls, drovers' yelps, and all sorts of mocking cries and noises with the "Amens" of the earnest congregation. Their rough horse-play on the fringe of the sanctified gathering was grievous enough; everybody knew that much worse things went on farther out in the surrounding darkness. Indeed, popular report gave to these external phases of the Camp Meeting an even more evil fame than attached to the later moonlight husking-bees, or the least reputable of the midwinter dances at Dave Randall's low halfway house.

Cynics said that the Methodists found consolation for this scandal in the large income they derived from their unruly visitors' gate-money. This was unfair. No doubt the money played its part, but there was something else far more important. The pious dwellers in the camp, intent upon reviving in their poor modern way the character and environment of the heroic early days, felt the need of just this hostile and scoffing mob about them to bring out the spirit they sought. Theirs was pre-eminently a fighting religion, which languished in peaceful fair weather, but flamed high in the storm. The throng of loafers and light-minded worldlings of both sexes, with their jeering interruptions and lewd

levity of conduct, brought upon the scene a kind of visible personal devil, with whom the chosen could do battle face to face. The daylight services became more and more perfunctory as the sojourn in the woods ran its course, and interest concentrated itself upon the night meetings, for the reason that *then* came the fierce wrestle with a Beelzebub of flesh and blood. And it was not so one-sided a contest either!

No evening passed without its victories for the pulpit. Careless or mischievous young people who were pushed into the foremost ranks of the mockers, and stood grinning and grimacing under the lights, would of a sudden feel a spell clamped upon them. They would hear a strange, quavering note in the preacher's voice, catch the sense of a piercing, soul-commanding gleam in the eye, not at all to be resisted. These occult forces would take control of them, drag them forward as in a dream to the benches under the pulpit, and abase them there like worms in the dust. And then the preacher would descend and the elders advance, and the torch-fires would sway and dip before the wind of the mighty roar that went up in triumph from the brethren.

These combats with Satan at close quarters, if they made the week-day evenings exciting, reacted with an effect of crushing dulness upon the Sunday services. The rule was to admit no strangers to the grounds from Saturday night to Monday morning. Every year at-

tempts were made to rescind or modify this rule, and this season at least three-fourths of the laymen in attendance had signed a petition in favour of opening the gates. The two Presiding Elders, supported by a dozen of the older preachers, resisted the change, and they had the backing of the more bigoted section of the congregation from Octavius. The controversy reached a point where Theron's Presiding Elder threatened to quit the grounds, and the leaders of the open-Sunday movement spoke freely of the ridiculous figure which its cranks and fanatics made poor Methodism cut in the eyes of modern go-ahead American civilisation. Then Theron Ware saw his opportunity, and preached an impromptu sermon upon the sanctity of the Sabbath, which ended all discussion. Sometimes its arguments seemed to be on one side, sometimes on the other, but always they were clothed with so serene a beauty of imagery, and moved in such a lofty and rarefied atmosphere of spiritual exaltation, that it was impossible to link them to so sordid a thing as any question of gate-money. When he had finished nobody wanted the gates opened. The two factions found that the difference between them had melted out of existence. They sat entranced by the charm of the sermon; then, glancing around at the empty benches, glaringly numerous in the afternoon sunlight, they whispered regrets that ten thousand people had not been there to hear that marvellous dis-

course. Theron's conquest was of exceptional dimensions. The majority, whose project he had defeated, were strangers, who appreciated and admired his effort most. His own flock, who led the minority, though less susceptible to the influence of graceful diction and delicately balanced rhetoric, were proud of the distinction he had reflected upon them, and delighted with him for having won their fight. The Presiding Elders wrung his hand with a significant grip. The extremists of his own charge beamed friendship upon him for the first time. He was the veritable hero of the week.

The prestige of this achievement made it the easier for Theron to get away by himself next day and walk in the woods. A man of such power had a right to solitude. The few who noted his departure from the camp remembered with pleasure that he was to preach again on the morrow. He was going to commune with God in the depths of the forest, that the message next day might be clearer and more luminous still.

Theron strolled for a little, with an air of aimlessness, until he was well outside the more or less frequented neighbourhood of the camp. Then he looked at the sun and the lay of the land with that informing scrutiny of which the farm-bred boy never loses the trick, turned, and strode at a rattling pace down the hillside. He knew nothing personally of this piece of woodland—a spur of the great Adirondack wilderness,

thrust southward into the region of homesteads and dairies and hop-fields—but he had prepared himself by a study of the map, and he knew where he wanted to go. Very soon he hit upon the path he had counted upon finding, and at this he quickened his gait.

Three months of the new life had wrought changes in Theron. He bore himself more erectly, for one thing; his shoulders were thrown back, and seemed thicker. The alteration was even more obvious in his face. The effect of lank, wistful, sallow juvenility had vanished. It was the countenance of a mature, well-fed, and confident man, firmer and more rounded in its outlines, and with a glow of health on its whole surface. Under the chin were the suggestions of fulness which bespeak an easy mind. His clothes were new; the frock-coat fitted him, and the thin, dark-coloured autumn overcoat, with its silk lining exposed at the breast, gave a masculine bulk and shape to his figure. He wore a shining tall hat, and, in haste though he was, took pains not to knock it against low-hanging branches.

All had gone well—more than well—with him. The second Quarterly Conference had passed without a ripple. Both the attendance and the collections at his church were larger than ever before, and the tone of the congregation toward him was altered distinctly for the better. As for himself, he viewed with astonished delight the progress he had made in his own estimation.

He had taken Sister Soulsby's advice, and the results were already wonderful. He had put aside, once and for all, the thousand foolish trifles and childish perplexities which formerly had racked his brain and worried him out of sleep and strength. He borrowed all sorts of books boldly now from the Octavius public library, and could swim with a calm mastery and enjoyment upon the deep waters into which Draper and Lecky and Laing and the rest had hurled him. He dallied pleasurably, a little languorously, with a dozen aspects of the case against revealed religion, ranging from the mild heterodoxy of Andover's qualms to the rude Ingersoll's rollicking negation of God Himself, as a woman of coquetry might play with as many would-be lovers. They amused him; they were all before him to choose, and he was free to postpone indefinitely the act of selection. There was a sense of the luxurious in this position which softened bodily as well as mental fibres. He ceased to grow indignant at things below or outside his standards, and he bought a small book which treated of the care of the hand and finger-nails.

Alice had accepted with deference his explanation that well-kept hands played so important a part in pulpit oratory. For that matter, she now accepted whatever he said or did with admirable docility. It was months since he could remember her venturing upon a critical attitude toward him. She had not wished to

leave home, for the seaside or any other resort, during the summer, but had worked outside in her garden more than usual. This was inexpensive, and it seemed to do her as much good as a holiday could have done. Her new devotional zeal was now quite an old thing; it had not slackened at all from the revival pitch. At the outset she had tried several times to talk with her husband upon this subject. He had discouraged conversation about her soul and its welfare, at first obliquely, then, under compulsion, with some directness. His thoughts were absorbed, he said, by the contemplation of vast, abstract schemes of creation and the government of the universe, and it only diverted and embarrassed his mind to try and fasten it upon the details of personal salvation. Thereafter the topic was not broached between them.

She bestowed a good deal of attention, too, upon her piano. The knack of a girlish nimbleness of touch had returned to her after a few weeks, and she made music which Theron supposed was very good—for her. It pleased him, at all events, when he sat and listened to it; but he had a far greater pleasure, as he listened, in dwelling upon the memories of the yellow and blue room which the sounds always brought up. Although three months had passed, Thurston's had never asked for the first payment on the piano, or even sent in a bill. This impressed him as being peculiarly graceful

behaviour on their part, and he recognised its delicacy by not going near Thurston's at all.

An hour's sharp walk, occasionally broken by short cuts across open pastures, but for the most part on forest paths, brought Theron to the brow of a small knoll, free from underbrush and covered sparsely with beech-trees. The ground was soft with moss and the powdered remains of last year's foliage; the leaves above him were showing the first yellow stains of autumn. A sweet smell of ripening nuts was thick upon the air, and busy rustlings and chirpings through the stillness told how the chipmunks and squirrels were attending to their harvest.

Theron had no ears for these noises of the woodland. He had halted, and was searching through the little vistas offered between the stout grey trunks of the beeches for some sign of a more sophisticated sort. Yes! there were certainly voices to be heard down in the hollow. And now, beyond all possibility of mistake, there came up to him the low, rhythmic throb of music. It was the merest faint murmur of music, made up almost wholly of groaning bass notes, but it was enough. He moved down the slope, swiftly at first, then with increasing caution. The sounds grew louder as he advanced, until he could hear the harmony of the other strings in its place beside the uproar of the big fiddles,

and distinguish from both the measured noise of many feet moving as one.

He reached a place from which, himself unobserved, he could overlook much of what he had come to see.

The bottom of the glade below him lay out in the full sunshine, as flat and as velvety in its fresh greenness as a garden lawn. Its open expanse was big enough to accommodate several distinct crowds, and here the crowds were—one massed about an enclosure in which young men were playing at football, another gathered farther off in a horse-shoe curve at the end of a baseball diamond, and a third thronging at a point where the shade of overhanging woods began, focussed upon a centre of interest which Theron could not identify. Closer at hand, where a shallow stream rippled along over its black-slate bed, some little boys, with legs bared to the thighs, were paddling about, under the charge of two men clad in long black gowns. There were others of these frocked monitors scattered here and there upon the scene—pallid, close-shaven, monkish figures—who none the less wore modern hats, and superintended with knowledge the games of the period. Theron remembered that these were the Christian Brothers, the semi-monastic teachers of the Catholic school.

And this was the picnic of the Catholics of Octavius. He gazed in mingled amazement and exhilaration upon

the spectacle. There seemed to be literally thousands of people on the open fields before him, and apparently there were still other thousands in the fringe of the woods round about. The noises which arose from this multitude—the shouts of the lads in the water, the playful squeals of the girls in the swings, the fused uproar of the remoter crowds, and above all the diligent, ordered strains of the dance-music proceeding from some invisible distance in the greenwood—charmed his ears with their suggestion of universal merriment. He drew a long breath—half pleasure, half wistful regret—as he remembered that other gathering in the forest which he had left behind.

At any rate, it should be well behind him to-day—whatever the morrow might bring! Evidently he was on the wrong side of the circle for the headquarters of the festivities. He turned and walked to the right through the beeches, making under cover a detour of the crowds at play. At last he rounded the long oval of the clearing, and found himself directly overlooking that largest throng of all, which had been too far away for comprehension at the beginning. There was no mystery now. A rough, narrow shed, fully fifty feet in length, imposed itself in an arbitrary line across the face of this crowd, dividing it into two compact halves. Inside this shed, protected all round by a waist-high barrier of boards, on top of which ran a flat table-like

covering, were twenty men in their shirt-sleeves, toiling ceaselessly to keep abreast of the crowd's thirst for beer. The actions of these bar-tenders greatly impressed Theron. They moved like so many machines, using one hand, apparently, to take money and give change, and with the other incessantly sweeping off rows of empty glasses, and tossing forward in their place fresh foaming glasses five at a time. Hundreds of arms and hands were continually stretched out on both sides of the shed toward this streaming bar, and through the babel of eager cries rose without pause the racket of mallets tapping new kegs.

Theron had never seen any considerable number of his fellow-citizens engaged in drinking lager beer before. His surprise at the facility of those behind the bar began to yield, upon observation, to a profound amazement at the thirst of those before it. The same people seemed to be always in front, emptying the glasses faster than the busy men inside could replenish them, and clamouring tirelessly for more. New-comers had to force their way to the bar by violent efforts, and once there they stayed until pushed bodily aside. There were actually women to be seen here and there in the throng, elbowing and shoving like the rest for a place at the front. Some of the more gallant young men fought their way outward from time to time, carrying for safety above their heads glasses of beer, which they

gave to young and pretty girls standing on the fringe of the crowd, among the trees.

Everywhere a remarkable good humour prevailed. Once a sharp fight broke out, just at the end of the bar nearest Theron, and one young man was knocked down. A rush of the onlookers confused everything before the minister's eyes for a minute, and then he saw the aggrieved combatant up on his legs again, consenting under the kindly pressure of the crowd to shake hands with his antagonist and join him in more beer. The incident caught his fancy. There was something very pleasingly human, he thought, in this primitive readiness to resort to fisticuffs, and this frank and genial reconciliation.

Perhaps there was something contagious in this wholesale display of thirst, for the Rev. Mr. Ware became conscious of a notion that he should like to try a glass of beer. He recalled having heard that lager was really a most harmless beverage. Of course it was out of the question that he should show himself at the bar. Perhaps someone would bring him out a glass, as if he were a pretty girl. He looked about for a possible messenger. Turning, he found himself face to face with two smiling people, into whose eyes he stared for an instant in dumbfounded blankness. Then his countenance flashed with joy, and he held out both hands in greeting. It was Father Forbes and Celia.

“We stole down upon you unawares,” said the priest, in his cheeriest manner. He wore a brown straw hat and loose clothes hardly at all clerical in form, and had Miss Madden’s arm drawn lightly within his own. “We could barely believe our eyes—that it could be you whom we saw, here among the sinners!”

“I am in love with your sinners,” responded Theron, as he shook hands with Celia, and trusted himself to look fully into her eyes. “I’ve had five days of the saints, over in another part of the woods, and they’ve bored the head off me.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT the command of Father Forbes, a lad who was loitering near them went down through the throng to the bar, and returned with three glasses of beer. It pleased the Rev. Mr. Ware that the priest should have taken it for granted that he would do as the others did. He knocked his glass against theirs in compliance with a custom strange to him, but which they seemed to understand very well. The beer itself was not so agreeable to the taste as he had expected, but it was cold and refreshing.

When the boy had returned with the glasses the three stood for a moment in silence, meditatively watching the curious scene spread below them. Beyond the bar, Theron could catch now through the trees regularly recurring glimpses of four or five swings in motion. These were nearest him, and clearest to the vision as well, at the instant when they reached their highest forward point. The seats were filled with girls, some of them quite grown young women, and their curving upward sweep through the air was disclosing at its climax a remarkable profusion of white skirts and black stock-

ings. The sight struck him as indecorous in the extreme, and he turned his eyes away. They met Celia's, and there was something latent in their brown depths which prompted him, after a brief dalliance of interchanging glances, to look again at the swings.

"That old maid Curran is really too ridiculous with those white stockings of hers," remarked Celia; "some friend ought to tell her to dye them."

"Or pad them," suggested Father Forbes, with a gay little chuckle. "I dare say the question of swings and ladies' stockings hardly arises with you, over at the Camp Meeting, Mr. Ware?"

Theron laughed aloud at the conceit. "I should say not!" he replied.

"I'm just dying to see a Camp Meeting!" said Celia. "You hear such racy accounts of what goes on at them."

"Don't go, I beg of you," urged Theron, with doleful emphasis. "Don't let's even talk about them. I should like to feel this afternoon as if there was no such thing within a thousand miles of me as a Camp Meeting. Do you know, all this interests me enormously. It is a revelation to me to see these thousands of good, decent, ordinary people just frankly enjoying themselves like human beings. I suppose that in this whole huge crowd there isn't a single person who will mention the subject of his soul to any other person all day long."

"I should think the assumption was a safe one," said the priest smilingly; "unless," he added on afterthought, "it be by way of a genial profanity. There used to be some old Clare men who said 'Hell to my soul!' when they missed at quoits, but I haven't heard it for a long time. I dare say they're all dead."

"I shall never forget that deathbed where I saw you first," remarked Theron musingly. "I date from that experience a whole new life. I have been greatly struck lately, in reading our *Northern Christian Advocate*, to see in the obituary notices of prominent Methodists how over and over again it is recorded that they got religion in their youth through being frightened by some illness of their own or some epidemic about them. The cholera year of 1832 seems to have made Methodists hand-over-fist. Even to this day our most successful revivalists, those who work conversions wholesale wherever they go, do it more by frightful pictures of hell-fire surrounding the sinner's deathbed than anything else. You could hear the same thing at our Camp Meeting to-night, if you were there."

"There isn't so much difference as you think," said Father Forbes dispassionately. "Your people keep examining their souls, just as children keep pulling up the bulbs they have planted to see are there any roots yet. Our people are more satisfied to leave their souls alone, once they have been planted, so to speak, by

baptism. But fear of hell governs them both pretty much alike. As I remember saying to you once before, there is really nothing new under the sun. Even the saying is not quite original. Though there seems to have been the most tremendous changes in races and civilisations and religions, stretching over many thousands of years, yet nothing is in fact altered very much. Where theology is concerned, the human race are still very like savages in a dangerous wood in the dark, telling each other ghost-stories around a camp fire. They have always been like that."

"What nonsense!" cried Celia. "I have no patience with such gloomy rubbish. The Greeks had a religion full of beauty and happiness and light-heartedness, and they weren't frightened of death at all. They made the image of death a beautiful boy, with a torch turned down. Their greatest philosophers openly preached and practised the doctrine of suicide when one was tired of life. Our own early Church was full of these broad and beautiful Greek ideas. You know that yourself. And it was only when your miserable Jeromes and Augustines and Cyrils brought in the abominable meanesses and cruelties of the Jewish Old Testament, and stamped out the sane and lovely Greek elements in the Church, that Christians became the poor, whining, cowardly egotists they are, troubling about their own

little tin-pot souls, and scaring themselves in their churches by skulls and cross-bones."

"My dear Celia," interposed the priest, patting her shoulder gently, "we will have no Greek debate to-day. Mr. Ware has been permitted to taboo Camp Meetings, and I claim the privilege to cry off on Greeks. Look at those fellows down there, trampling over one another to get more beer. What have they to do with Athens, or Athens with them? I take it, Mr. Ware," he went on, with a grave face but a twinkling eye, "that what we are observing here in front of us is symbolical of a great ethical and theological revolution, which in time will modify and control the destiny of the entire American people. You see those young Irishmen there, struggling like pigs at a trough to get their fill of German beer. That signifies a conquest of Teuton over Kelt more important and far-reaching in its results than the landing of Hengist and Horsa. The Kelt has come to grief heretofore, or at least been forced to play second fiddle to other races, because he lacked the right sort of a drink. He has in his blood an excess of impulsive, imaginative, even fantastic qualities. It is much easier for him to make a fool of himself, to begin with, than it is for people of slower wits and more sluggish temperaments. When you add whisky to that, or that essence of melancholia which in Ireland they call 'porthar,' you get the Kelt at his very weakest and worst. These

young men down there are changing all that: they have discovered lager. Already many of them can out-drink the Germans at their own beverage. The lager-drinking Irishman in a few generations will be a new type of humanity—the Kelt at his best. He will dominate America. He will be *the* American; and his Church—with the Italian element thrown clean out of it, and its Pope living, say, in Baltimore or Georgetown—will be the Church of America.”

“Let us have some more lager at once,” put in Celia. “This revolution can’t be hurried forward too rapidly.”

Theron could not feel sure how much of the priest’s discourse was in jest, how much in earnest. “It seems to me,” he said, “that, as things are going, it doesn’t look much as if the America of the future will trouble itself about any kind of a Church. The march of science must very soon produce a universal scepticism. It is in the nature of human progress. What all intelligent men recognise to-day, the masses must surely come to see in time.”

Father Forbes laughed outright this time. “My dear Mr. Ware,” he said, as they touched glasses again and sipped the fresh beer that had been brought them, “of all our fictions there is none so utterly baseless and empty as this idea that humanity progresses. The savage’s natural impression is that the world he sees

about him was made for him, and that the universe at large is subordinated to him and his world, and that all the spirits and demons and gods occupy themselves exclusively with him and his affairs. That idea was the basis of every pagan religion, and it is the basis of the Christian religion, simply because it is the foundation of human nature. That foundation is just as firm and unshaken to-day as it was in the Stone Age. It will always remain, and upon it will always be built some kind of a religious superstructure. 'Intelligent men,' as you call them, really have very little influence, even when they all pull one way. The people as a whole soon get tired of them. They give too much trouble. The most powerful forces in human nature are self-protection and inertia. The middle-aged man has found out that the chief wisdom in life is to bend to the pressures about him, to shut up and do as others do. Even when he thinks he has rid his own mind of superstitions, he sees that he will best enjoy a peaceful life by leaving other people's superstitions alone. That is always the ultimate view of the crowd."

"But I don't see," observed Theron, "granting that all this is true, how you think the Catholic Church will come out on top. I could understand it of Unitarianism, or Universalism, or the Episcopal Church, where nobody seems to have to believe particularly in anything except the beauty of its burial service, but I should think the

very rigidity of the Catholic creed would make it impossible. There everything is hard and fast; nothing is elastic; there is no room for compromise."

"The Church is always compromising," explained the priest, "only it does it so slowly that no one man lives long enough to quite catch it at the trick. No; the great secret of the Catholic Church is, that it doesn't debate with sceptics. No matter what points you make against it, it is never betrayed into answering back. It simply says these things are sacred mysteries, which you are quite free to accept and be saved, or reject and be damned. There is something intelligible and fine about an attitude like that. When people have grown tired of their absurd and fruitless wrangling over texts and creeds which, humanly speaking, are all barbaric nonsense, they will come back to repose pleasantly under the Catholic roof, in that restful house where things are taken for granted. There the manners are charming, the service excellent, the decoration and upholstery most acceptable to the eye, and the music"—he made a little mock bow here to Celia—"the music at least is divine. There you have nothing to do but be agreeable, and avoid scandal, and observe the *convenances*. You are no more expected to express doubts about the Immaculate Conception than you are to ask the lady whom you take down to dinner how old she is. Now that is, as I have said, an intelligent and rational Church for people to

have. As the Irish civilise themselves—you observe them diligently engaged in the process down below there—and the social roughness of their Church becomes softened and ameliorated, Americans will inevitably be attracted toward it. In the end it will embrace them all, and be modified by them, and in turn influence their development, till you will have a new nation and a new national Church, each representative of the other.”

“And all this is to be done by lager beer!” Theron ventured to comment, jokingly. He was conscious of a novel perspiration around the bridge of his nose, which was obviously another effect of the drink.

The priest passed the pleasantry by. “No,” he said seriously; “what you must see is, that there must always be a Church. If one did not exist it would be necessary to invent it. It is needed, first and foremost, as a police force; it is needed, secondly, so to speak, as a fire insurance. It provides the most even temperature and pure atmosphere for the growth of young children. It furnishes the best obtainable social machinery for marrying off one’s daughters, getting to know the right people, patching up quarrels, and so on. The priesthood earn their salaries as the agents for these valuable social arrangements. Their theology is thrown in as a sort of intellectual diversion, like the ritual of a benevolent organisation. There are some

who get excited about this part of it, just as one hears of Freemasons who believe that the sun rises and sets to exemplify their ceremonies. Others take their duties more quietly, and, understanding just what it all amounts to, make the best of it, like you and me."

Theron assented to the philosophy and the compliment by a grave bow. "Yes, that is the idea—to make the best of it," he said, and fastened his regard boldly this time upon the swings.

"We were both ordained by our Bishops," continued the priest, "at an age when those worthy old gentlemen would not have trusted our combined wisdom to buy a horse for them."

"And I was married," broke in Theron, with an eagerness almost vehement, "when I had only just been ordained! At the worst, *you* had only the Church fastened upon your back before you were old enough to know what you wanted. It is easy enough to make the best of *that*, but it is different with me."

A marked silence followed this outburst. The Rev. Mr. Ware had never spoken of his marriage to either of these friends before, and something in their manner seemed to suggest that they did not find the subject inviting, now that it had been broached. He himself was filled with a desire to say more about it. He had never clearly realised before what a genuine grievance

it was. The moisture at the top of his nose merged itself into tears in the corners of his eyes as the cruel enormity of the sacrifice he had made in his youth rose before him. His whole life had been fettered and darkened by it. He turned his gaze from the swings toward Celia, to claim the sympathy he knew she would feel for him.

But Celia was otherwise engaged. A young man had come up to her—a tall and extremely thin young man, soberly dressed, and with a long, gaunt, hollow-eyed face, the skin of which seemed at once florid and pale. He had sandy hair and the rough hands of a workman, but he was speaking to Miss Madden in the confidential tones of an equal.

“I can do nothing at all with him,” this new-comer said to her. “He’ll not be said by me. Perhaps he’d listen to you.”

“It’s likely I’d go down there!” said Celia. “He may do what he likes for me! Take my advice, Michael, and just go your way and leave him to himself. There was a time when I would have taken out my eyes for him, but it was love wasted and thrown away. After the warnings he’s had, if he *will* bring trouble on himself, let us make it no affair of ours!”

Theron had found himself exchanging glances of inquiry with this young man. “Mr. Ware,” said Celia

here, "let me introduce you to my brother Michael, my full brother."

Mr. Ware remembered him now, and began, in response to the other's formal bow, to say something about their having met in the dark, inside the church. But Celia held up her hand. "I'm afraid, Mr. Ware," she said hurriedly, "that you are in for an exhibition of the family skeleton. I will apologise for the infliction in advance."

Wonderingly, Theron followed her look, and saw another young man who had come up the path from the crowd below, and was close upon them. The minister recognised in him a figure which had seemed to be the centre of almost every group about the bar that he had studied in detail. He was a small, dapper, elegantly attired youth, with dark hair and the handsome, regularly carved face of an actor. He advanced with a smiling countenance and unsteady step—his silk hat thrust back upon his head, his frock-coat and vest unbuttoned, and his neck-wear disarranged—and saluted the party with amiability.

"I saw you up here, Father Forbes," he said, with a thickened and erratic utterance. "Whyn't you come down and join us? I'm setting 'em up for everybody. You got to take care of the boys, you know. I'll blow in the last cent I've got in the world for the boys, every

time, and they know it. They're solider for me than they ever were for anybody. That's how it is. If you stand by the boys, the boys'll stand by you. I'm going to the Assembly for this district, and they ain't nobody can stop me. The boys are just red hot for me. Wish you'd come down, Father Forbes, and address a few words to the meeting—just mention that I'm a candidate and say I'm bound to win hands down. That'll make you solid with the boys, and we'll be all good fellows together. Come on down!"

The priest affably disengaged his arm from the clutch which the speaker had laid upon it, and shook his head in gentle deprecation. "No, no; you must excuse me, Theodore," he said. "We mustn't meddle in politics, you know."

"Politics be damned!" urged Theodore, grabbing the priest's other arm, and tugging at it stoutly to pull him down the path. "I say, boys!" he shouted to those below, "here's Father Forbes, and he's going to come down and address the meeting. Come on, Father! Come down and have a drink with the boys."

It was Celia who sharply pulled his hand away from the priest's arm this time. "Go away with you!" she snapped in low, angry tones at the intruder. "You should be ashamed of yourself! If you can't keep sober yourself, you can at least keep your hands off

the priest. I should think you'd have more decency, when you're in such a state as this, than to come where I am. If you've no respect for yourself, you might have had that much respect for me! And before strangers, too!"

"Oh, I mustn't come where *you* are, eh?" remarked the peccant Theodore, straightening himself with an elaborate effort. "You've bought these woods, have you? I've got a hundred friends here, all the same, for every one you'll ever have in your life, Red-head, and don't you forget it."

"Go and spend your money with them, then, and don't come insulting decent people!" said Celia.

"Before strangers, too!" the young man called out, with beery sarcasm. "Oh, we'll take care of the strangers all right." He had not seemed to be aware of Theron's presence, much less his identity, before, but he turned to him now with a knowing grin. "I'm running for the Assembly, Mr. Ware," he said, speaking loudly and with deliberate effort to avoid the drunken elisions and comminglings to which his speech tended, "and I want you to fix up your Methodists solid for me. I'm going to drive over to the Camp Meeting to-night, me and some of the boys, in a barouche, and I'll put a twenty-dollar bill on their plate. Here it is now, if you want to see it."

As the young man began fumbling in a vest-pocket Theron gathered his wits together. "You'd better not go this evening," he said as convincingly as he knew how, "because the gates will be closed very early, and the Saturday evening services are of a particularly special nature, quite reserved for those living on the grounds."

"Rats!" said Theodore, raising his head and abandoning the search for the bill. "Why don't you speak out like a man and say you think I'm too drunk?"

"I don't think that is a question which need arise between us, Mr. Madden," murmured Theron confusedly.

"Oh, don't you make any mistake! A hell of a lot of questions arise between us, Mr. Ware," cried Theodore, with a sudden accession of vigour in tone and mien. "And one of 'em is—go away from me, Michael!—one of 'em is, I say, why don't you leave our girls alone? They've got their own priests to make fools of themselves over, without any sneak of a Protestant parson coming meddling round them. You're a married man into the bargain, and you've got in your house this minute a piano that my sister bought and paid for. Oh, I've seen the entry in Thurston's books! You have the cheek to talk to me about being drunk! Why——"

These remarks were never concluded, for Father

Forbes here clapped a hand abruptly over the offending mouth and flung his free arm in a tight grip around the young man's waist. "Come with me, Michael," he said, and the two men led the reluctant and resisting Theodore at a sharp pace off into the woods.

Theron and Celia stood and watched them disappear among the undergrowth. "It's the dirty Foley blood that's in him!" he hear her say, as if between clenched teeth.

The girl's big brown eyes, when Theron looked into them again, were still fixed upon the screen of foliage, and dilated like those of a Medusa mask. The blood had gone away, and left the fair face and neck as white, it seemed to him, as marble. Even her lips, fiercely bitten together, appeared colourless. The picture of consuming and powerless rage which she presented, and the shuddering tremor which ran over her form, as visible as the quivering track of a gust of wind across a pond, awed and frightened him.

Tenderness toward her helpless state came too, and uppermost. He drew her arm into his and turned their backs upon the picnic scene.

"Let us walk a little up the path into the woods," he said, "and get away from all this."

"The farther away the better," she answered bitterly, and he felt the shiver run through her again as she spoke.

The methodical waltz-music from that unseen dancing-platform rose again above all other sounds. They moved up the woodland path, their steps insensibly falling into the rhythm of its strains, and vanished from sight among the trees.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERON and Celia walked in silence for some minutes, until the noises of the throng they had left behind were lost. The path they followed had grown indefinite among the grass and creepers of the forest carpet; now it seemed to end altogether at a little copse of young birches, the delicately graceful stems of which were clustered about a parent stump, long since decayed and overgrown with lichens and layers of thick moss.

As the two paused, the girl suddenly sank upon her knees, then threw herself face forward upon the soft green bank which had formed itself above the roots of the ancient mother-tree. Her companion looked down in pained amazement at what he saw. Her body shook with the violence of recurring sobs, or rather gasps of wrath and grief. Her hands, with stiffened, claw-like fingers, dug into the moss and tangle of tiny vines and tore them by the roots. The half-stifled sounds of weeping that arose from where her face grovelled in the leaves were terrible to his ears. He knew not what to say or do, but gazed in resourceless suspense

at the strange figure she made. It seemed a cruelly long time that she lay there, almost at his feet, struggling fiercely with the fury that was in her.

All at once the paroxysms passed away, the sounds of wild weeping ceased. Celia sat up, and with her handkerchief wiped the tears and leafy fragments from her face. She rearranged her hat and the braids of her hair with swift instinctive touches, brushed the woodland *débris* from her front, and sprang to her feet.

"I'm all right now," she said briskly. There was palpable effort in her light tone, and in the stormy sort of smile which she forced upon her blotched and perturbed countenance, but they were only too welcome to Theron's anxious mood.

"Thank God!" he blurted out, all radiant with relief. "I feared you were going to have a fit, or something."

Celia laughed, a little artificially at first, then with a genuine surrender to the comic side of his visible fright. The mirth came back into the brown depths of her eyes, and her face cleared itself of tear-stains and the marks of agitation. "I *am* a nice quiet party for a Methodist minister to go walking in the woods with, am I not?" she cried, shaking her skirts and smiling at him.

"I am not a Methodist minister, please!" answered

Theron; "at least not to-day—and here—with you! I am just a man—nothing more—a man who has escaped from lifelong imprisonment, and feels for the first time what it is to be free."

"Ah, my friend!" Celia said, shaking her head slowly, "I'm afraid you deceive yourself. You are not by any means free. You are only looking out of the window of your prison, as you call it. The doors are locked just the same."

"I will smash them!" he declared with confidence. "Or, for that matter, I *have* smashed them—battered them to pieces! You don't realise what progress I have made, what changes there have been in me, since that night—you remember that wonderful night! I am quite another being, I assure you! And really it dates from away beyond that—why, from the very first evening, when I came to you in the church. The window in Father Forbes' room was open, and I stood by it listening to the music next door, and I could just faintly see on the dark window across the alley-way a stained-glass picture of a woman. I suppose it was the Virgin Mary. She had hair like yours, and your face too, and that is why I went into the church and found you. Yes, that is why."

Celia regarded him with gravity. "You will get yourself into great trouble, my friend," she said.

“That’s where you’re wrong,” put in Theron. “Not that I’d mind any trouble in this wide world, so long as you called me ‘my friend;’ but I’m not going to get into any at all. I know a trick worth two of that. I’ve learned to be a showman. I can preach now far better than I used to, and I can get through my work in half the time, and keep on the right side of my people, and get along with perfect smoothness. I was too green before. I took the thing seriously, and I let every mean-fisted curmudgeon and crazy fanatic worry me and keep me on pins and needles. I don’t do that any more. I’ve taken a new measure of life. I see now what life is really worth, and I’m going to have my share of it. Why should I deliberately deny myself all possible happiness for the rest of my days, simply because I made a fool of myself when I was in my teens? Other men are not eternally punished like that, for what they did as boys, and I won’t submit to it either. I will be as free to enjoy myself as—as Father Forbes.”

Celia smiled softly and shook her head again. “Poor man, to call *him* free!” she said. “Why, he is bound hand and foot. You don’t in the least realise how he is hedged about, the work he has to do, the thousand suspicious eyes that watch his every movement, eager to bring the Bishop down upon him. And then think of his sacrifice—the greatest sacrifice of all—to never know what love means, to forswear his man-

hood, to live a forlorn, celibate life—you have no idea how sadly that appeals to a woman.”

“Let us sit down here for a little,” said Theron; “we seem at the end of the path.” She seated herself on the root-based mound, and he reclined at her side, with an arm carelessly extended behind her on the moss.

“I can see what you mean,” he went on after a pause; “but to me, do you know, there is an enormous fascination in celibacy. You forget that I know the reverse of the medal. I know how the mind can be cramped, the nerves harassed, the ambitions spoiled and rotted, the whole existence darkened and belittled, by—by the other thing. I have never talked to you before about my marriage.”

“I don’t think we’d better talk about it now,” observed Celia. “There must be many more amusing topics.”

He missed the spirit of her remark. “You are right,” he said slowly; “it *is* too sad a thing to talk about. But there! it is my load, and I bear it, and there’s nothing more to be said.”

Theron drew a heavy sigh, and let his fingers toy abstractedly with a ribbon on the outer edge of Celia’s penumbra of apparel.

“No,” she said; “we mustn’t snivel, and we mustn’t sulk. When I get into a rage it makes me ill, and I

storm my way through it and tear things; but it doesn't last long, and I come out of it feeling all the better. I don't know that I've ever seen your wife. I suppose she hasn't got red hair?"

"I think it's a kind of light brown," answered Theron, with an effect of exerting his memory.

"It seems that you only take notice of hair in stained-glass windows," was Celia's comment.

"Oh—h!" he murmured reproachfully; "as if—as if—but I won't say what I was going to."

"That's not fair!" she said. The little touch of whimsical mockery which she gave to the serious declaration was delicious to him. "You have me at such a disadvantage! Here am I rattling out whatever comes into my head, exposing all my lightest emotions and laying bare my very heart in candour, and you meditate—you turn things over cautiously in your mind, like a second Machiavelli. I grow afraid of you—you are so subtle and mysterious in your reserves."

Theron gave a tug at the ribbon to show the joy he had in her delicate chaff. "No, it is you who are secretive," he said. "You never told me about—about the piano."

The word was out! A minute before it had seemed incredible to him that he should ever have the courage to utter it; but here it was. He laid firm hold upon the ribbon, which, it appeared, hung from her waist,

and drew himself a trifle nearer to her. "I could never have consented to take it, I'm afraid," he went on in a low voice, "if I had known. And even as it is, I fear it won't be possible."

"What are you afraid of?" asked Celia. "Why shouldn't you take it? People in your profession never do get anything unless it's given to them, do they? I've always understood it was like that. I've often read of donation parties—that's what they're called, isn't it?—where everybody is supposed to bring some gift to the minister. Very well, then, I've simply had a donation party of my own, that's all; unless you mean that my being a Catholic makes a difference. I had supposed you were quite free from that kind of prejudice."

"So I am! Believe me, I am!" urged Theron. "When I'm with you it seems impossible to realise that there are people so narrow and contracted in their natures as to take account of such things. It is another atmosphere that I breathe near you. How could you imagine that such a thought—about our difference of creed—would enter my head? In fact," he concluded, with a nervous half-laugh, "there isn't any such difference. Whatever your religion is, it's mine too. You remember, you adopted me as a Greek."

"Did I?" she rejoined. "Well, if that's the case, it leaves you without a leg to stand on. I challenge you to find any instance where a Greek made any difficulties

about accepting a piano from a friend. But seriously—while we are talking about it—you introduced the subject; I didn't—I might as well explain to you that I had no such intention when I picked the instrument out. It was later, when I was talking to Thurston's people about the price, that the whim seized me. Now, it is the one fixed rule of my life to obey my whims. Whatever occurs to me as a possibly pleasant thing to do—straight, like a flash, I go and do it. It is the only way that a person with means—with plenty of money—can preserve any freshness of character. If they stop to think what it would be prudent to do, they get crusted over immediately. That is the curse of rich people; they teach themselves to distrust and restrain every impulse toward unusual actions; they get to feel that it is more necessary for them to be cautious and conventional than it is for others. I would rather work at a wash-tub than occupy that attitude toward my bank account. I fight against any sign of it that I detect rising in my mind. The instant a wish occurs to me, I rush to gratify it. That is my theory of life. That accounts for the piano, and I don't see that you've anything to say about it at all."

It seemed very convincing, this theory of life. Somehow, the thought of Miss Madden's riches had never before assumed prominence in Theron's mind. Of course her father was very wealthy, but it had not oc-

curred to him that the daughter's emancipation might run to the length of a personal fortune. He knew so little of rich people and their ways!

He lifted his head and looked up at Celia, with an awakened humility and awe in his glance. The glamour of a separate banking account shone upon her. Where the soft woodland light played in among the strands of her disordered hair he saw the veritable gleam of gold. A mysterious new suggestion of power blended itself with the beauty of her face, was exhaled in the faint perfume of her garments. He maintained a timorous hold upon the ribbon, wondering at his hardihood in touching it, or being near her at all.

"What surprises me," he heard himself saying, "is that you are contented to stay in Octavius. I should think that you would travel—go abroad—see the beautiful things of the world, surround yourself with the luxuries of big cities—and all that sort of thing."

Celia regarded the forest prospect straight in front of her with a pensive gaze. "Some time—no doubt I will some time," she said abstractedly.

"One reads so much nowadays," he went on, "of American heiresses going to Europe and marrying dukes and noblemen. I suppose you will do that too. Princes would fight one another for *you*."

The least touch of a smile softened for an instant the impassivity of her countenance. Then she stared

harder than ever at the vague, leafy distance. "That is the old-fashioned idea," she said, in a musing tone, "that women must belong to somebody, as if they were curios, or statues, or race-horses. You don't understand, my friend, that I have a different view. I am myself, and I belong to myself, exactly as much as any man. The notion that any other human being could conceivably obtain the slightest property rights in me is as preposterous, as ridiculous, as—what shall I say?—as the notion of your being taken out with a chain on your neck and sold by auction as a slave, down on the canal bridge. I should be ashamed to be alive for another day if any other thought were possible to me."

"That is not the generally accepted view—I should think," faltered Theron.

"No more is it the accepted view that young married Methodist ministers should sit out alone in the woods with red-headed Irish girls. No, my friend; let us find what the generally accepted views are, and as fast as we find them set our heels on them. There is no other way to live like real human beings. What on earth is it to me that other women crawl about on all-fours, and fawn like dogs on any hand that will buckle a collar on to them and ensure them the leavings of the table? I am not related to them. I have nothing to do with them. They cannot make any rules for me. If pride and dignity and independence are dead in

them, why, so much the worse for them. It is no affair of mine. Certainly it is no reason why I should get down and grovel also. No, I at least stand erect on my legs."

Mr. Ware sat up and stared confusedly, with round eyes and parted lips, at his companion. Instinctively his brain dragged forth to the surface those epithets which the Doctor had hurled in bitter contempt at her—"mad ass—a bundle of egotism, ignorance, and red-headed immodesty." The words rose in their order on his memory, hard and sharp-edged, like arrow-heads. But to sit there, quite at her side; to breathe the same air, and behold the calm loveliness of her profile; to touch the ribbon of her dress—and all the while to hold these poisoned darts of abuse levelled in thought at her breast—it was monstrous. He could have killed the Doctor at that moment. With an effort, he drove the foul things from his mind—scattered them back into the darkness. He felt that he had grown pale, and wondered if she had heard the groan that seemed to have been forced from him in the struggle. Or was the groan imaginary?

Celia continued to sit unmoved, composedly looking upon vacancy. Theron's eye searched her face in vain for any sign of consciousness that she had astounded and bewildered him. She did not seem to be thinking of him at all. The proud calm of her thoughtful

countenance suggested instead occupation with lofty and remote abstractions and noble ideals. Contemplating her, he suddenly perceived that what she had been saying was great, wonderful, magnificent. An involuntary thrill ran through his veins at recollection of her words. His fancy likened it to the sensation he used to feel as a youth when the Fourth of July reader bawled forth that opening clause, "When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary," &c. It was nothing less than another Declaration of Independence that he had been listening to.

He sank again recumbent at her side, and stretched the arm behind her, nearer than before. "Apparently, then, you will never marry." His voice trembled a little.

"Most certainly not!" said Celia.

"You spoke so feelingly a little while ago," he ventured along, with hesitation, "about how sadly the notion of a priest's sacrificing himself—never knowing what love meant—appealed to a woman. I should think that the idea of sacrificing herself would seem to her even sadder still."

"I don't remember that we mentioned *that*," she replied. "How do you mean—sacrificing herself?"

Theron gathered some of the outlying folds of her dress in his hand, and boldly patted and caressed them. "You, so beautiful and so free, with such fine

talents and abilities," he murmured; "you, who could have the whole world at your feet—are you, too, never going to know what love means? Do you call that no sacrifice? To me it is the most terrible that my imagination can conceive."

Celia laughed—a gentle, amused little laugh, in which Theron's ears traced elements of tenderness. "You must regulate that imagination of yours," she said playfully. "It conceives the thing that is not. Pray when"—and here, turning her head, she bent down upon his face a gaze of arch mock-seriousness—"pray when did I describe myself in these terms? When did I say that I should never know what love meant?"

For answer Theron laid his head down upon his arm, and closed his eyes, and held his face against the draperies encircling her. "I cannot think!" he groaned.

The thing that came uppermost in his mind, as it swayed and rocked in the tempest of emotion, was the strange reminiscence of early childhood in it all. It was like being a little boy again, nestling in an innocent, unthinking transport of affection against his mother's skirts. The tears he felt scalding his eyes were the spontaneous, unashamed tears of a child; the tremulous and exquisite joy which spread, wave-like, over him, at once reposeful and yearning, was full of infantile purity and sweetness. He had not comprehended at all be-

fore what well-springs of spiritual beauty, what limpid depths of idealism, his nature contained.

"We were speaking of our respective religions," he heard Celia say, as imperturbably as if there had been no digression worth mentioning.

"Yes," he assented, and moved his head so that he looked up at her back hair, and the leaves high above, mottled against the sky. The wish to lie there, where now he could just catch the rose-leaf line of her under-chin as well, was very strong upon him. "Yes?" he repeated.

"I cannot talk to you like that," she said, and he sat up again, shamefacedly.

"Yes—I think we were speaking of religions—some time ago," he faltered, to relieve the situation. The dreadful thought that she might be annoyed began to oppress him.

"Well, you said whatever my religion was, it was yours too. That entitles you at least to be told what the religion is. Now, I am a Catholic."

Theron, much mystified, nodded his head. Could it be possible—was there impending a deliberate suggestion that he should become a convert? "Yes, I know," he murmured.

"But I should explain that I am a Catholic only in the sense that its symbolism is pleasant to me. You remember what Schopenhauer said—'You cannot have

the water by itself; you must also have the jug that it is in.' Very well, the Catholic religion is my jug. I put into it the things I like. They were all there long ago, thousands of years ago. The Jews threw them out; we will put them back again. We will restore art and poetry, and the love of beauty, and the gentle, spiritual, soulful life. The Greeks had it—and Christianity would have had it too if it hadn't been for those brutes they call the Fathers. They loved ugliness and dirt and the thought of hell-fire. They hated women. In all the earlier stages of the Church women were very prominent in it. Jesus Himself appreciated women, and delighted to have them about Him, and talk with them and listen to them. That was the very essence of the Greek spirit, and it breathed into Christianity at its birth a sweetness and a grace which twenty generations of cranks and savages like Paul and Jerome and Tertullian couldn't wholly extinguish. But the very man—Cyril—who killed Hypatia, and thus began the dark ages, unwittingly did another thing which makes one almost forgive him. To please the Egyptians he secured the Church's acceptance of the adoration of the Virgin. It is that idea which has kept the Greek spirit alive, and grown and grown till at last it will rule the world. It was only epileptic Jews who could imagine a religion without sex in it."

"I remember the pictures—of the Virgin—in your

room," said Theron, feeling more himself again. "I wondered if they—quite went with the statues."

The remark won a smile from Celia's lips. "They get along together better than you suppose," she answered. "Besides, they are not all pictures of Mary. One of them—standing on the moon—is of Isis with the infant Horus in her arms. Another might as well be Mahamie bearing the miraculously born Buddha, or Olympias with her child Alexander, or even Perictione holding her babe Plato; all these were similar cases, you know. Almost every religion had its Immaculate Conception. What does it all come to, except to show us that man turns naturally toward the worship of the maternal idea? That is the deepest of all his instincts—love of woman, who is at once daughter and wife and mother. It is that that makes the world go round."

Brave thoughts shaped themselves in Theron's mind, and shone forth in a confident yet wistful smile on his face.

"It is a pity you cannot change estates with me for one minute," he said in steady, low tones; "then you would realise the tremendous truth of what you have been saying. It is only your intellect that has reached out and grasped the idea. If you were in my place, you would discover that your heart was bursting with it as well,"

Celia turned and looked at him.

"I myself," he went on, "would not have known half-an-hour ago what you meant by the worship of the maternal idea. I am much older than you. I am a strong, mature man; but when I lay down there and shut my eyes—because the charm and marvel of this whole experience had for the moment overcome me—the strangest sensation seized upon me. It was absolutely as if I were a boy again—a good, pure-minded, fond little child, and you were the mother that I idolised."

Celia had not taken her eyes from his face. "I find myself liking you better at this moment," she said with gravity, "than I have ever liked you before."

Then, as by a sudden impulse, she sprang to her feet. "Come!" she cried, her voice and manner all vivacity once more: "we have been here long enough."

Upon the instant, as Theron was more laboriously getting up, it became apparent to them both that perhaps they had been there too long.

A boy with a gun under his arm, and two grey squirrels tied by the tails slung across his shoulder, stood at the entrance to the glade, some dozen paces away, regarding them with undisguised interest. Upon the discovery that he was in turn observed, he resumed

his interrupted progress through the woods, whistling softly as he went, and vanished among the trees.

"Heavens above!" groaned Theron shudderingly.

"Know him?" he went on, in answer to the glance of inquiry on his companion's face. "I should think I did! He spades my—my wife's garden for her. He used to bring our milk. He works in the law office of one of my trustees—the one who isn't friendly to me, but is very friendly indeed with my — with Mrs. Ware. Oh! what shall I do? It may easily mean my ruin!"

Celia looked at him attentively. The colour had gone out of his face, and with it the effect of earnestness and mental elevation, which a minute before had caught her fancy. "Somehow I fear I do not like you quite so much just now, my friend," she remarked.

"In God's name, don't say that!" urged Theron. He raised his voice in agitated entreaty. "You don't know what these people are—how they would leap at the barest hint of a scandal about me. In my position—I am a thousand times more defenceless than any woman—just a single whisper, and I am done for!"

"Let me point out to you, Mr. Ware," said Celia slowly, "that to be seen sitting and talking with me, whatever doubts it may raise as to a gentleman's in-

tellectual condition, need not necessarily blast his social reputation beyond all hope whatever."

Theron stared at her as if he had not grasped her meaning. Then he winced visibly under it, and put out his hands to implore her. "Forgive me! forgive me!" he pleaded. "I was beside myself for the moment with the fright of the thing. Oh, say you do forgive me, Celia!" He made haste to support this daring use of her name. "I have been so happy to-day—so deeply, so vastly happy—like the little child I spoke of—and that is so new in my lonely life—that—the suddenness of the thing—it just for the instant unstrung me. Don't be too hard on me for it! And I had hoped, too—I had had such genuine, heartfelt pleasure in the thought—that an hour or two ago, when *you* were unhappy, perhaps it had been some sort of consolation to you that I was with you."

Celia was looking away. When he took her hand she did not withdraw it, but turned and nodded in musing general assent to what he had said. "Yes, we have both been unstrung, as you call it, to-day," she said; "decidedly out of pitch. Let each forgive the other and say no more about it."

She took his arm and they retraced their steps along the path again in silence. The laboured noise of the orchestra, as it were, returned to meet them. They halted at an intersecting footpath.

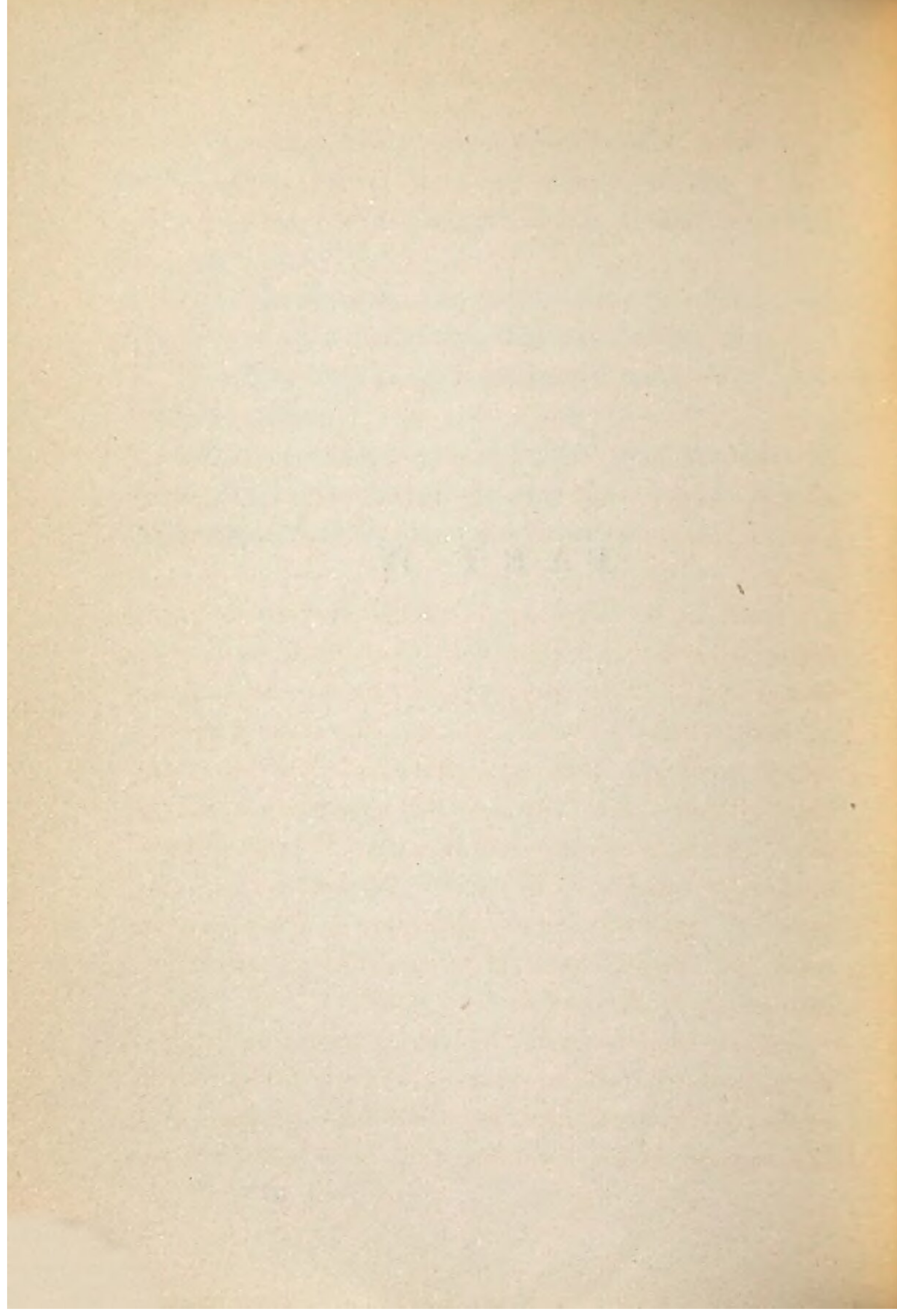
"I go back to my slavery—my double bondage," said Theron, letting his voice sink to a sigh. "But even if I am put on the rack for it, I shall have had one day of glory."

"I think you may kiss me in memory of that one day—or of a few minutes in that day," said Celia.

Their lips brushed each other in a swift, almost perfunctory, caress.

Theron went his way at a hurried pace, the sobered tones of her "Good-bye!" beating upon his brain with every measure of the droning waltz-music.

P A R T I V.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE memory of the kiss abode with Theron. Like Aaron's rod, it swallowed up one by one all competing thoughts and recollections, and made his brain its slave.

Even as he strode back through the woods to the Camp Meeting, it was the kiss that kept his feet in motion and guided their automatic course. All along the watches of the restless night it was the kiss that bore him sweet company, and wandered with him from one broken dream of bliss to another. Next day it was the kiss that made of life for him a sort of sunlit wonderland. He preached his sermon in the morning, and took his appointed part in the other services of afternoon and evening, apparently to everybody's satisfaction: to him it was all a vision.

When the beautiful full moon rose this Sunday night, and glorified the clearing and the forest with its mellow harvest radiance, he could have groaned with the burden of his joy. He went out alone into the

light, and bared his head to it, and stood motionless for a long time. In all his life he had never been impelled so powerfully toward earnest and soulful thanksgiving. The impulse to kneel there, in the pure, tender moonlight, and lift up offerings of praise to God, kept uppermost in his mind. Some formless reservation restrained him from the act itself, but the spirit of it hallowed his mood. He gazed up at the broad, luminous face of the satellite. "You are our god," he murmured. "Hers and mine! You are the most beautiful of heavenly creatures, as she is of the angels on earth. I am speechless with reverence for you both."

It was not until the Camp Meeting broke up, four days later, and Theron with the rest returned to town, that the material aspects of what had happened, and might be expected to happen, forced themselves on his mind. The kiss was a child of the forest. So long as Theron remained in the camp, the image of the kiss, which was enshrined in his heart, and ministered to by all his thoughts, continued enveloped in a haze of sylvan mystery, like a dryad. Suggestions of its beauty and holiness came to him in the odours of the woodland, at the sight of wild flowers and water-lilies. When he walked alone in unfamiliar parts of the forest, he carried about with him the half-conscious idea of somewhere coming upon a strange hidden pool which mortal eye had not seen before—a deep, sequestered

mere of spring-fed waters, walled in by rich, tangled growths of verdure, and bearing upon its virgin bosom only the shadows of the primeval wilderness and the light of the eternal skies. His fancy dwelt upon some such nook as the enchanted home of the fairy that possessed his soul. The place, though he never found it, became real to him. As he pictured it, there rose sometimes from among the lily-pads, stirring the translucent depths and fluttering the water's surface with drops like gems, the wonderful form of a woman with pale leaves wreathed in her luxuriant red hair and a skin which gave forth light.

With the home-coming to Octavius, his dreams began to take more account of realities. In a day or two he was wide awake and thinking hard. The kiss was as much as ever the ceaseless companion of his hours, but it no longer insisted upon shrouding itself in vines and woodland creepers, or outlining itself in phosphorescent vagueness against mystic backgrounds of nymph-haunted glades. It advanced out into the noonday, and assumed tangible dimensions and substance. He saw that it was related to the facts of his daily life, and had, in turn, altered his own relations to all these facts.

What ought he to do? What *could* he do? Apparently nothing but wait. He waited for a week; then for another week. The conclusion that the initiative

had been left to him began to take shape in his mind. From this it seemed but a step to the passionate resolve to act at once.

Turning the situation over and over in his anxious thoughts, two things stood out in special prominence. One was, that Celia loved him; the other was, that the boy in Gorrings's law office, and possibly Gorrings and Heaven only knew how many others beside, had reasons for suspecting this to be the case.

And what about Celia? Side by side with the moving rapture of thinking about her as a woman, there rose the substantial satisfaction of contemplating her as Miss Madden. She had kissed him, and she was very rich. The things gradually linked themselves before his eyes. He tried a thousand varying guesses at what she proposed to do, and each time reined up his imagination by the reminder that she was confessedly a creature of whims, who proposed to do nothing, but was capable of all things.

And as to the boy. If he had blabbed what he saw, it was incredible that somebody should not take the subject up and impart a scandalous twist to it, and send it rolling like a snow-ball to gather up exaggeration and foul innuendo till it was big enough to overwhelm him. What would happen to him if a formal charge were preferred against him? He looked it up in the Discipline. Of course, if his accusers magnified their mean

suspicious and calumnious imaginings to the point of formulating a charge, it would be one of immorality. They could prove nothing; there was nothing to prove. At the worst, it was an indiscretion, which would involve his being admonished by his Presiding Elder. Or if these narrow bigots confused slanders with proofs, and showed that they intended to convict him, then it would be open to him to withdraw from the ministry, in advance of his condemnation. His relation to the Church would be the same as if he had been expelled, but to the outer world it would be different. And supposing he did withdraw from the ministry?

Yes, this was the important point. What if he did abandon this mistaken profession of his? On its mental side the relief would be prodigious, unthinkable. But on the practical side, the bread-and-butter side? For some days Theron paused with a shudder when he reached this question. The thought of the plunge into unknown material responsibilities gave him a sinking heart. He tried to imagine himself lecturing, canvassing for books or insurance policies, writing for newspapers—and remained frightened. But suddenly one day it occurred to him that these qualms and forebodings were sheer folly. Was not Celia rich? Would she not with lightning swiftness draw forth that cheque-book, like the flashing sword of a champion from its scabbard, and

run to his relief? Why, of course. It was absurd not to have thought of that before.

He recalled her momentary anger with him that afternoon in the woods, when he had cried out that discovery would mean ruin to him. He saw clearly enough now that she had been grieved at his want of faith in her protection. In his flurry of fright, he had lost sight of the fact that, if exposure and trouble came to him, she would naturally feel that she had been the cause of his martyrdom. It was plain enough now. If he got into hot water, it would be solely on account of his having been seen with her. He had walked into the woods with her—"the farther the better" had been her own words—out of pure kindness, and the desire to lead her away from the scene of her brother's and her own humiliation. But why amplify arguments? Her own warm heart would tell her, on the instant, how he had been sacrificed for her sake, and would bring her, eager and devoted, to his succour.

That was all right, then. Slowly, from this point, suggestions expanded themselves. The future could be, if he willed it, one long serene triumph of love and lofty intellectual companionship: of existence softened and enriched at every point by all that wealth could command and the most exquisite tastes suggest. Should he will it? Ah! the question answered itself. But he

could not enter upon this beckoning heaven of a future until he had freed himself. When Celia said to him, "Come!" he must not be in the position to reply, "I should like to, but unfortunately I am tied by the leg." He should have to leave Octavius, leave the ministry, leave everything. He could not begin too soon to face these contingencies.

Very likely Celia had not thought it out as far as this. With her it was a mere vague "Sometime I may." But the harder masculine sense, Theron felt, existed for the very purpose of correcting and giving point to these loose feminine notions of time and space. It was for him to clear away the obstacles and map the plans out with definite decision.

One warm afternoon, as he lolled in his easy-chair under the open window of his study, musing upon the ever-shifting phases of this vast, complicated urgent problem, some chance words from the side-walk in front came to his ears, and coming, remained to clarify his thoughts.

Two ladies whose voices were strange to him had stopped, as so many people almost daily stopped, to admire the garden of the parsonage. One of them expressed her pleasure in general terms. Said the other:

"My husband declares those dahlias alone couldn't be matched for thirty dollars, and that some of those

gladioli must have cost as much as a dollar apiece. I know we've spent simply oceans of money on our garden, and it doesn't begin to compare with this."

"It seems like a sinful waste to me," said her companion.

"No—o," the other hesitated. "No, I don't think quite that—if you can afford it just as well as not. But it does seem to me that I'd rather live in a little better house, and not spend it *all* on flowers. Just *look* at that cactus!"

The voices died away. Theron sat up, with a look of arrested thought upon his face, then sprang to his feet and moved hurriedly through the parlour to an open front window. Peering out with caution, he saw that the two women receding from view were fashionably dressed and evidently came from homes of means. He stared after them, in a blank way, until they turned a corner.

He went into the hall, there put on his frock-coat and hat, and stepped out into the garden. He was conscious of having rather avoided it heretofore, not altogether without reasons of his own, lying unexamined somewhere in the recesses of his mind. Now he walked slowly about, and examined the flowers with great attentiveness. The season was advancing, and he saw that many plants had gone out of bloom. But what a magnificent plenitude of blossoms still remained!

Thirty dollars' worth of dahlias; that was what the stranger had said. Theron hardly brought himself to credit the statement, but all the same it was apparent to even his uninformed eye that these huge, imbricated, flowering masses, with their extraordinary half-colours, must be unusual. He remembered that the boy in Gorrings's office had spoken of just one lot of plants costing thirty-one dollars sixty cents, and there had been two other lots as well. The figures remained surprisingly distinct in his memory. It was no good deceiving himself any longer: of course these were the plants that Gorrings had spent his money upon, here all about him.

As he surveyed them with a sour regard, a cool breeze stirred across the garden. The tall, overladen flower-spikes of gladioli bent and nodded at him; the hollyhocks and flaming salvias, the clustered blossoms on the standard roses, the delicately painted lilies on their stilt-like stems, fluttered in the wind, and seemed all bowing satirically to him. "Yes, Levi Gorrings paid for us!" he almost heard their mocking declaration.

Out in the back-yard, where a longer day of sunshine dwelt, there were many other flowers, and notably a bed of geraniums which literally made the eye ache. Standing at this rear corner of the house, he caught the droning sound of Alice's voice, humming a hymn to herself as she went about her kitchen work.

He saw her through the open window. She was sweeping, and had a sort of cap on her head which did not add to the graces of her appearance. He looked at her with a hard glance, recalling as a fresh grievance the ten days of intolerable boredom he had spent cooped up in a ridiculous little tent with her at the Camp Meeting. She must have realised at the time how odious the enforced companionship was to him. Yes, beyond doubt she did. It came back to him now that they had spoken but rarely to each other. She had not even praised his sermon upon the Sabbath question, which everyone else had been in raptures over. For that matter, she no longer praised anything he did, and took obvious pains to preserve toward him a distant demeanour. So much the better, he felt himself thinking. If she chose to behave in that offish and unwifely fashion, she could blame no one but herself for its results.

She had seen him, and came now to the window, watering-pot and broom in hand. She put her head out, to breathe a breath of dustless air, and began as if she would smile on him. Then her face chilled and stiffened as she caught his look.

"Shall you be home for supper?" she asked in her iciest tone.

He had not thought before of going out. The question, and the manner of it, gave immediate urgency to

the idea of going somewhere. "I may or I may not," he replied. "It is quite impossible for me to say." He turned on his heel with this, and walked briskly out of the yard and down the street.

It was the most natural thing that presently he should be strolling past the Madden house, and letting a covert glance stray over its front and the grounds about it as he loitered along. Every day since his return from the woods he had given the fates this chance of bringing Celia to meet him, without avail. He had hung about in the vicinity of the Catholic church on several evenings as well, but to no purpose. The organ inside was dumb, and he could detect no signs of Celia's presence on the curtains of the pastorate next door. This day, too, there was no one visible at the home of the Maddens, and he walked on, a little sadly. It was weary work waiting for the signal that never came.

But there were compensations. His mind reverted doggedly to the flowers in his garden, and to Alice's behaviour toward him. They insisted upon connecting themselves in his thoughts. Why should Levi Gorringer, a money-lender, and therefore the last man in the world to incur reckless expenditure, go and buy perhaps a hundred dollars' worth of flowers for his wife's garden? It was time—high time—to face this question. And his

experiencing religion afterward, just when Alice did, and marching down to the rail to kneel beside her—that was a thing to be thought of, too.

Meditation, it is true, hardly threw fresh light upon the matter. It was incredible, of course, that there should be anything wrong. To even shape a thought of Alice in connection with gallantry would be wholly impossible. Nor could it be said that Gorringe, in his new capacity as a professing church member, had disclosed any sign of ulterior motives or of insincerity. Yet there the facts were. While Theron pondered them, their mystery, if they involved a mystery, baffled him altogether. But when he had finished he found himself, all the same, convinced that neither Alice nor Gorringe would be free to blame him for anything he might do. He had grounds for complaint against them. If he did not himself know just what these grounds were, it was certain enough that *they* knew. Very well, then, let them take the responsibility for what happened.

It was indeed awkward that at the moment, as Theron chanced to emerge temporarily from his brown study, his eyes fell full upon the spare, well-knit form of Levi Gorringe himself, standing only a few feet away, in the staircase entrance to his law office. His lean face, browned by the summer's exposure, had a more Arabian aspect than ever. His hands were in his pockets, and he held an unlighted cigar between his

teeth. He looked the Rev. Mr. Ware over calmly, and nodded recognition.

Theron had halted instinctively. On the instant he would have given a great deal not to have stopped at all. It was stupid of him to have paused, but it would not do now to go on without words of some sort. He moved over to the doorway, and made a half-hearted pretence of looking at the photographs in one of the show-cases at its side. As Mr. Gorringe did not take his hands from his pockets, there was no occasion for any formal greeting.

"I had no idea that they took such good pictures in Octavius," Theron remarked after a minute's silence, still bending in examination of the photographs.

"They ought to; they charge New York prices," observed the lawyer sententiously.

Theron found in the words confirmation of his feeling that Gorringe was not naturally a lavish or extravagant man. Rather was he a careful and calculating man, who spent money only for a purpose. Though the minister continued gazing at the stiff presentments of local beauties and swains, his eyes seemed to see salmon-hued hollyhocks and spotted lilies instead. Suddenly a resolve came to him. He stood erect and faced his trustee.

"Speaking of the price of things," he said, with an effort of arrogance in his measured tone, "I have never

had an opportunity before of mentioning the subject of the flowers you have so kindly furnished for my—for *my* garden.”

“Why mention it now?” queried Gorringe, with nonchalance. He turned his cigar about with a movement of his lips and worked it into the corner of his mouth. He did not find it necessary to look at Theron at all.

“Because——” began Mr. Ware, and then hesitated. “Because—well, it raises a question of my being under obligation, which I——”

“Oh no, sir!” said the lawyer; “put that out of your mind. You are no more under obligation to me than I am to you. Oh no; make yourself easy about that. Neither of us owes the other anything.”

“Not even goodwill—I take that to be your meaning,” retorted Theron, with some heat.

“The words are yours, sir,” responded Gorringe coolly. “I do not demur to them.”

“As you like,” put in the other. “If it be so, why then all the more reason why I should, under the circumstances——”

“Under what circumstances?” interposed the lawyer. “Let us be clear about this thing as we go along. To what circumstances do you refer?”

He had turned his eyes now and looked Theron in the face. A slight protrusion of his lower jaw had given the cigar an upward tilt under the black moustache.

"The circumstances are, that you have brought or sent to my garden a great many very expensive flower-plants and bushes, and so on."

"And you object? I had not supposed that clergymen in general—and you in particular—were so sensitive. Have donation parties, then, gone out of date?"

"I understand your sneer well enough," retorted Theron, "but that can pass. The main point is, that you did me the honour to send these plants—or to smuggle them in—but never once deigned to hint to me that you had done so. No one told me. Except by merest accident, I should not have known to this day where they came from."

Mr. Gorringe twisted the cigar at another angle, with lines of grim amusement about the corner of his mouth. "I should have thought," he said, with dry deliberation, "that possibly this fact might have raised in your mind the conceivable hypothesis that the plants might not be intended for you at all."

"That is precisely it, sir!" said Theron. There were people passing, and he was forced to keep his voice down. It would have been a relief, he felt, to shout. "That is it!—they were *not* intended for me."

"Well, then, what are you talking about?" The lawyer's speech had become abrupt, quite to incivility.

"I think my remarks have been perfectly clear,"

said the minister, with dignity. It was a new experience to be addressed in that fashion. It occurred to him to add, "Please remember that I am not in the witness-box, to be insulted by a professional bully."

Gorringe studied Theron's face attentively, with a cold, searching scrutiny. "You may thank your stars you're not!" he said, with significance.

What on earth could he mean? The words and the menacing tone greatly impressed Theron. Indeed, upon reflection, he found that they frightened him. The disposition to adopt a high tone with the lawyer was melting away.

"I do not see," he began, and then deliberately allowed his voice to take on an injured and plaintive inflection—"I do not see why you should adopt this tone toward me, Brother Gorringe."

The lawyer scowled and bit sharply into the cigar, but said nothing.

"If I have unconsciously offended you in any way," Theron went on, "I beg you to tell me how. I liked you from the beginning of my pastorate here, and the thought that latterly we seemed to be drifting apart has given me much pain. But now it is still more distressing to find you actually disposed to quarrel with me. Surely, Brother Gorringe, between a pastor and a probationer who——"

"No," Gorringe broke in, "quarrel isn't the word for

it. "There isn't any quarrel, Mr. Ware." He stepped down from the door-stone to the side-walk as he spoke, and stood face to face with Theron. Working-men with dinner-pails and factory-girls were passing close to them, and he lowered his voice to a sharp, incisive half-whisper as he added, "It wouldn't be worth any grown man's while to quarrel with so poor a creature as you are."

Theron stood confounded, with an empty stare of bewilderment on his face. It rose in his mind that the right thing to feel was rage, righteous indignation, fury. But for the life of him he could not muster any manly anger. The character of the insult stupefied him.

"I do not know that I have anything to say to you in reply," he remarked, after what seemed to him a silence of minutes. His lips framed the words automatically, but they expressed well enough the blank vacancy of his mind. The suggestion that anybody deemed him a "poor creature" grew more astounding, incomprehensible, as it swelled in his brain.

"No, I suppose not," snapped Gorringe. "You're not the sort to stand up to men; your form is to go round the corner and take it out of somebody weaker than yourself—a defenceless woman, for instance."

"O-ho!" said Theron. The exclamation had uttered itself. The sound of it seemed to clarify his

muddled thoughts, and as they ranged themselves in order he began to understand his new advantage. "O-ho!" he said again, and nodded his head in token of comprehension.

The lawyer, chewing his cigar with increased activity, glared at him. "What do you mean?" he demanded peremptorily.

"Mean?" said the minister. "Oh, nothing that I feel called upon to explain to you."

It was passing strange, but his self-possession had all at once returned to him. As it became more apparent that the lawyer was losing his temper, Theron found the courage to turn up the corners of his lips in show of a bitter little smile of confidence. He looked into the other's dusky face, and flaunted this smile at it in contemptuous defiance. "It is not a subject that I can discuss with propriety—at this stage," he added.

"Damn you! are you talking about those flowers?"

"Oh, I am not talking about anything in particular," returned Theron, "not even the curious choice of language which my latest probationer seems to prefer."

"Go and strike my name off the list!" said Gorringe, with rising passion. "I was a fool to ever have it there. To think of being a probationer of *yours*—my God!"

"That will be a pity—from one point of view,"

remarked Theron, still with the ironical smile on his lips. "You seemed to enter upon the new life with such deliberation and fixity of purpose, too! I can imagine the regrets your withdrawal will cause, in certain quarters. I only hope that it will not discourage those who accompanied you to the altar and shared your enthusiasm at the time." He had spoken throughout with studied slowness and an insolent nicety of utterance.

"You had better go away!" broke forth Gorringe. "If you don't I shall forget myself."

"For the first time?" asked Theron. Then, warned by the flash in the lawyer's eye, he turned on his heel and sauntered, with a painstaking assumption of a mind quite at ease, up the street.

Gorringe's own face twitched and his veins tingled as he looked after him. He spat the shapeless cigar out his mouth into the gutter, and drawing forth another from his pocket, clenched it between his teeth, his gaze following the tall form of the Methodist minister till it was merged in the crowd.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said aloud to himself.

The photographer had come down to take in his show-cases for the night. He looked up from his task at the exclamation and grinned inquiringly.

"I've just been talking to a man," said the lawyer, "who's so much meaner than any other man I ever

heard of that it takes my breath away. He's got a wife that's as pure and good as gold, and he knows it, and she worships the ground he walks on, and he knows that too. And yet the scoundrel is around trying to sniff out some shadow of a pretext for misusing her worse than he's already done. Yes, sir; he'd be actually tickled to death if he could nose up some hint of a scandal about her—something that he could pretend to believe, and work for his own advantage, to levy blackmail, or get rid of her, or whatever suited his book. I didn't think there was such an out-and-out cur on this whole footstool. I almost wish, by God, I'd thrown him into the canal!"

"Yes, you lawyers must run against some pretty snide specimens," remarked the photographer, lifting one of the cases from its sockets.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THERON spent half-an-hour in aimless strolling about the streets. From earliest boyhood his mind had always worked most clearly when he walked alone. Every mental process which had left a mark upon his memory and his career—the day-dreams of future academic greatness and fame which had fashioned themselves in his brain as a farm-lad; the meditations, raptures, and high resolves of his student period at the seminary; the more notable sermons and powerful discourses by which he had revealed the genius that was in him to astonished and delighted assemblages—all were associated in his retrospective thoughts with solitary rambles.

He had a very direct and vivid consciousness now that it was good to be on his legs and alone. He had never in his life been more sensible of the charm of his own companionship. The encounter with Gorringe seemed to have cleared all the clouds out of his brain and restored lightness to his heart. After such an object-lesson, the impossibility of his continuing to sacrifice himself to a notion of duty to these low-minded and coarse-natured villagers was beyond all argument.

There could no longer be any doubt about his moral right to turn his back upon them, to wash his hands of the miserable combination of hypocrisy and hysterics which they called their spiritual life.

And the question of Gorringe and Alice—that too stood precisely where he wanted it. Even in his own thoughts he preferred to pursue it no farther. Between them somewhere an offence of concealment, it might be of conspiracy, had been committed against him. It was no business of his to say more, or to think more. He rested his case simply on the fact, which could not be denied, and which he was not in the least interested to have explained, one way or the other. The recollection of Gorringe's obvious disturbance of mind was especially pleasant to him. He himself had been magnanimous, almost to the point of weakness. He had gone out of his way to call the man "Brother," and to give him an opportunity of behaving like a gentleman, but his kindly forbearance had been wasted. Gorringe was not the man to understand generous feelings, much less rise to their level. He had merely shown that he would be vicious if he knew how. It was more important, and satisfactory, to recall that he had also shown a complete comprehension of the injured husband's grievance. The fact that he had recognised it was enough—was, in fact, everything.

In the background of his thoughts, Theron had

carried along a notion of going and dining with Father Forbes, when the time for the evening meal should arrive. The idea in itself attracted him, as a fitting capstone to his resolve not to go home to supper. It gave just the right kind of character to his domestic revolt. But when at last he stood on the doorstep of the pastorate, waiting for an answer to the tinkle of the electric bell he had heard ring inside, his mind contained only the single thought that now he should hear something about Celia. Perhaps he might even find her there; but he put that suggestion aside as slightly unpleasant.

The hag-faced housekeeper led him, as before, into the dining-room. It was still daylight, and he saw on the glance that the priest was alone at the table, with a book beside him to read from as he ate.

Father Forbes rose and came forward, greeting his visitor with profuse urbanity and smiles. If there was a perfunctory note in the invitation to sit down and share the meal, Theron did not catch it. He frankly displayed his pleasure as he laid aside his hat and took the chair opposite his host.

"It is really only a few months ago since I was here—in this room—before," he remarked, as the priest closed his book and tossed it to one side, and the housekeeper came in to lay another place. "Yet it

might have been years, many long years, so tremendous is the difference that the lapse of time has wrought in me."

"I am afraid we have nothing to tempt you very much, Mr. Ware," remarked Father Forbes, with a gesture of his plump white hand which embraced the dishes in the centre of the table. "May I send you a bit of this boiled mutton? I have very homely tastes when I am by myself."

"I was saying," Theron observed, after some moments had passed in silence, "that I date such a tremendous revolution in my thoughts, my beliefs, my whole mind and character, from my first meeting with you—my first coming here. I don't know how to describe to you the enormous change that has come over me. And I owe it all to you."

"I can only hope, then, that it is entirely of a satisfactory nature," said the priest, politely smiling.

"Oh, it is so splendidly satisfactory!" said Theron, with fervour. "I look back at myself now with wonder and pity. It seems incredible that such a little while ago I should have been such an ignorant and unimaginative clod of earth, content with such petty ambitions; actually proud of my limitations!"

"And you have larger ambitions now?" asked the other. "Pray let me help you to some turnips. I am

afraid that ambitions only get in our way and trip us up. We clergymen are like tram-car horses. The more steadily we jog along between the rails, the better it is for us."

"Oh, I don't intend to remain in the ministry," declared Theron. The statement seemed to him a little bald, now that he had made it, and as his companion lifted his brows in surprise, he added stumbingly, "That is, as I feel now, it seems to me impossible that I should remain much longer. With you, of course, it is different. You have a thousand things to interest and pleasantly occupy you in your work and its ceremonies, so that mere belief or non-belief in dogma hardly matters. But in our Church dogma is everything. If you take that away, or cease to have its support, the rest is intolerable, hideous."

Father Forbes cut another slice of mutton for himself. "It is a pretty serious business to make such a change, at your time of life. I take it for granted you will think it all over very carefully before you commit yourself." He said this with an almost indifferent air, which rather chilled his listener's enthusiasm.

"Oh yes," Theron made answer. "I shall do nothing rash. But I have a good many plans for the future."

Father Forbes did not ask what these were, and a brief further period of silence fell upon the table.

"I hope everything went off smoothly at the picnic," Theron ventured at last. "I have not seen any of you since then."

The priest shook his head and sighed. "No," he said. "It is a bad business. I have had a great deal of unhappiness out of it this past fortnight. That young man who was rude to you—of course it was mere drunken, irresponsible nonsense on his part—has got himself into a serious scrape, I'm afraid. It is being kept quite within the family, and we hope to manage so that it will remain there; but it has terribly upset his father and his sister. But that, after all, is not so hard to bear as the other affliction that has come upon the Maddens. You remember Michael, the elder brother? He seems to have taken cold that evening, or perhaps over-exerted himself. He has been seized with quick consumption. He will hardly last till snow flies."

"Oh, I *am* grieved to hear that!" Theron spoke with tremulous earnestness. It seemed to him as if Michael were in some way related to him.

"It is very hard upon them all," the priest went on. "Michael is as sweet and holy a character as it is possible for anyone to think of. He is the apple of his father's eye. They were inseparable, those two. Do you know the father—Mr. Madden?"

Theron shook his head. "I think I have seen him," he said. "A small man, with grey whiskers."

"A peasant," said Father Forbes, "but with a heart of gold. Poor man, he has had little enough out of his riches. Ah, the West Coast people, what tragedies I have seen among them over here! They have rudimentary lung organisations, like a frog's, to fit the mild, wet, soft air they live in. The sharp air here kills them off like flies in a frost. Whole families go. I should think there are a dozen of old Jeremiah's children in the cemetery. If Michael could have passed his twenty-eighth year there would have been hope for him, at least till his thirty-fifth. These pulmonary things seem to go by sevens, you know."

"I didn't know," said Theron. "It is very strange, and very sad." His startled mind was busy, all at once, with conjectures as to Celia's age.

"The sister—Miss Madden—seems extremely strong," he remarked tentatively.

"Celia may escape the general doom," said the priest. His guest noted that he clenched his shapely white hand on the table as he spoke, and that his gentle, carefully modulated voice had a gritty hardness in its tone. "*That* would be too dreadful to think of," he added.

Theron shuddered in silence, and strove to shut his mind against the thought.

"She has taken Michael's illness so deeply to heart,"

the priest proceeded, "and devoted herself to him so untiringly, that I get a little nervous about her. I have been urging her to go away and get a change of air and scene, if only for a few days. She does not sleep well, and that is always a bad thing."

"I think I remember her telling me once that sometimes she had sleepless spells," said Theron. "She said that then she banged on her piano at all hours, or dragged the cushions about from room to room, like a wild woman. A very interesting young lady; don't you find her so?"

Father Forbes let a wan smile play on his lips. "What! our Celia?" he said. "Interesting! Why, Mr. Ware, there is no one like her in the world. She is as unique as—what shall I say?—as the Irish are among races. Her father and mother were both born in mud cabins, and she—she might be the daughter of a hundred kings, except that they seem mostly rather underwitted than otherwise. She always impresses me as a sort of atavistic idealisation of the old Kelt at his finest and best. There in Ireland you got a strange mixture of elementary early peoples, walled off from the outer world by the four seas, and free to work out their own racial amalgam on their own lines. They brought with them at the outset a great inheritance of Eastern mysticism. Others lost it, but the Irish, all alone on their island, kept it alive and brooded on it, and rooted their

whole spiritual side in it. Their religion is full of it, their blood is full of it—our Celia is fuller of it than anybody else. The Ireland of two thousand years ago is incarnated in her. They are the merriest people and the saddest, the most turbulent and the most docile, the most talented and the most unproductive, the most practical and the most visionary, the most devout and the most pagan. These impossible contradictions war ceaselessly in their blood. When I look at Celia I seem to see in my mind's eye the fair young ancestral mother of them all."

Theron gazed at the speaker with open admiration. "I love to hear you talk," he said simply.

An unbidden memory flitted upward in his mind. Those were the very words that Alice had so often on her lips in their old courtship days. How curious it was! He looked at the priest, and had a quaint sensation of feeling as a romantic woman must feel in the presence of a specially impressive masculine personality. It was indeed strange that this soft-voiced, portly creature in a gown, with his white, fat hands and his feline suavity of manner, should produce such a commanding and unique effect of virility. No doubt this was a part of the great sex mystery which historically surrounded the figure of the celibate priest as with an atmosphere. Women had always been prostrating them-

selves before it. Theron, watching his companion's full, pallid face in the lamp-light, tired to fancy himself in the priest's place, looking down upon these worshipping female forms. He wondered what the celibate's attitude really was. The enigma fascinated him.

Father Forbes, after his rhetorical outburst, had been eating. He pushed aside his cheese-plate. "I grow enthusiastic on the subject of my race sometimes," he remarked, with the suggestion of an apology. "But I make up for it other times—most of the time—by scolding them. If it were not such a noble thing to be an Irishman, it would be ridiculous."

"Ah!" said Theron deprecatingly, "who would not be enthusiastic in talking of Miss Madden? What you said about her was perfect. As you spoke I was thinking how proud and thankful we ought to be for the privilege of knowing her—we who do know her well—although, of course, your friendship with her is vastly more intimate than mine—than mine could ever hope to be."

The priest offered no comment, and Theron went on: "I hardly know how to describe the remarkable impression she makes upon me. I can't imagine to myself any other young woman so brilliant or broad in her views, or so courageous. Of course, her being so rich makes it easier for her to do just what she wants

to do, but her bravery is astonishing all the same. We had a long and very sympathetic talk in the woods, that day of the picnic, after we left you. I don't know whether she spoke to you about it?"

Father Forbes made a movement of the head and eyes which seemed to negative the suggestion.

"Her talk," continued Theron, "gave me quite new ideas of the range and capacity of the female mind. I wonder that everybody in Octavius isn't full of praise and admiration for her talents and exceptional character. In such a small town as this, you would think she would be the centre of attention—the pride of the place."

"I think she has as much praise as is good for her," remarked the priest quietly.

"And here's a thing that puzzles me," pursued Mr. Ware. "I was immensely surprised to find that Dr. Ledsmar doesn't even think she is clever—or at least he professes the utmost intellectual contempt for her, and says he dislikes her into the bargain. But of course she dislikes him too, so that's only natural. But I can't understand his denying her great ability."

The priest smiled in a dubious way. "Don't borrow unnecessary alarm about that, Mr. Ware," he said, with studied smoothness of modulated tones. "These two good friends of mine have much enjoyment out of

the idea that they are fighting for the mastery over my poor unstable character. It has grown to be a habit with them, and a hobby as well, and they pursue it with tireless zest. There are not many intellectual diversions open to us here, and they make the most of this one. It amuses them, and it is not without its charms for me, in my capacity as an interested observer. It is a part of the game that they should pretend to themselves that they detest each other. In reality I fancy they like each other very much. At any rate, there is nothing to be disturbed about."

His mellifluous tones had somehow the effect of suggesting to Theron that he was an outsider, and would better mind his own business. Ah, if this purring pussy-cat of a priest only knew how little of an outsider he really was! The thought gave him an easy self-control.

"Of course," he said, "our warm mutual friendship makes the observation of these little individual vagaries merely a part of a delightful whole. I should not dream of discussing Miss Madden's confidences to me, or the Doctor's either, outside our own little group."

Father Forbes reached behind him, and took from a chair his black three-cornered cap with the tassel. "Unfortunately I have a sick call waiting me," he said, gathering up his gown and slowly rising.

"Yes, I saw the man sitting in the hall," remarked Theron, getting to his feet.

"I would ask you to go upstairs, and wait," the priest went on, "but my return, unhappily, is quite uncertain. Another time I may be more fortunate. I am going to New York to-morrow evening for some days, but when I get back——"

The polite sentence did not complete itself. Father Forbes had come out into the hall, giving a cool nod to the working-man who rose from the bench as they passed, and shook hands with his guest on the doorstep.

When the door had closed upon Mr. Ware, the priest turned to the man. "You have come about those frames?" he said. "If you will come upstairs, I will show you the prints, and you can give me a notion of what can be done with them. I rather fancy the idea of a tryptich in carved old English, if you can manage it."

After the workman had gone away, Father Forbes put on slippers and an old loose soutane, lighted a cigar, and pushing an easy-chair over to the reading-lamp, sat down with a book. Then something occurred to him, and he touched the house-bell at his elbow.

"Maggie," he said gently, when the housekeeper appeared at the door, "I will have the coffee and *fine*

champagne up here, if it is no trouble. And—oh, Maggie—I was compelled this evening to turn the blameless visit of the framemaker into a venial sin, and such things involve a needless wear and tear of conscience. I think that—hereafter—you understand?—I am not invariably at home when the Rev. Mr. Ware does me the honour to call.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THAT night brought the first frost of the season worth counting. In the morning, when Theron came downstairs, his casual glance through the window caught a desolate picture of blackened dahlia stalks and shrivelled blooms. The gaiety and colour of the garden were gone, and in their place was shabby and dishevelled ruin. He flung the sash up and leaned out. The nipping autumn air was good to breathe. He looked about him, surveying the havoc the frost had wrought among the flowers, and smiled.

At breakfast he smiled again—a mirthless and calculated smile. “I see that Brother Gorrings’s flowers have come to grief over night,” he remarked.

Alice looked at him before she spoke, and saw on his face a confirmation of the hostile hint in his voice. She nodded in a constrained way, and said nothing.

“Or rather, I should say,” Theron went on, with deliberate words, “the late Brother Gorrings’s flowers.”

“How do you mean, *late*?” asked his wife swiftly.

“Oh, calm yourself!” replied the husband. “He is not dead. He has only intimated to me his desire to

sever his connection. I may add that he did so in a highly offensive manner."

"I am very sorry," said Alice, in a low tone, and with her eyes on her plate.

"I took it for granted you would be grieved at his back-sliding," remarked Theron, making his phrases as pointed as he could. "He was such a promising probationer, and you took such a keen interest in his spiritual awakening. But the season of frost has nipped his zeal—along with the hundred or more dollars' worth of flowers by which he testified his faith. I find something interesting in their having been blasted simultaneously."

Alice dropped all pretence of interest in her breakfast. With a flushed face and lips tightly compressed, she made a movement as if to rise from her chair. Then changing her mind, she sat bolt upright and faced her husband.

"I think we had better have this out right now," she said, in a voice which Theron hardly recognised. "You have been hinting round the subject long enough—too long. There are *some* things nobody is obliged to put up with, and this is one of them. You will oblige me by saying out in so many words what it is you are driving at."

The outburst astounded Theron. He laid down his knife and fork, and gazed at his wife in frank surprise.

She had so accustomed him of late to a demeanour almost abject in its depressed docility, that he had quite forgotten the Alice of the old days, when she had spirit and courage enough for two, and a notable tongue of her own. The flash in her eyes, and the lines of resolution about her mouth and chin, for a moment daunted him. Then he observed by a flutter of the frill at her wrist that she was trembling.

"I am sure I have nothing to 'say out in so many words,' as you put it," he replied, forcing his voice into cool, impassive tones. "I merely commented upon a coincidence, that was all. If, for any reason under the sun, the subject chances to be unpleasant to you, I have no earthly desire to pursue it."

"But I insist upon having it pursued!" returned Alice. "I've had just all I can stand of your insinuations and innuendoes, and it's high time we had some plain talk. Ever since the revival, you have been dropping sly, underhand hints about Mr. Gorringer and—and me. Now I ask you what you mean by it!"

Yes, there was a shake in her voice, and he could see how her bosom heaved in a tremor of nervousness. It was easy for him to be very calm.

"It is you who introduce these astonishing suggestions, not I," he replied coldly. "It is you who couple your name with his—somewhat to my surprise, I admit—but let me suggest that we drop the subject.

You are excited just now, and you might say things that you would prefer to leave unsaid. It would surely be better for all concerned to say no more about it."

Alice, staring across the table at him, with knitted brows, emitted a sharp little snort of indignation. "Well, I never! Theron, I wouldn't have thought it of you!"

"There are so many things you wouldn't have thought, on such a variety of subjects," he observed, with a show of resuming his breakfast. "But why continue? We are only angering each other."

"Never mind that," she replied, with more control over her speech. "I guess things have come to a pass where a little anger won't do any harm. I have a right to insist on knowing what you mean by your insinuations."

Theron sighed. "Why will you keep harping on the thing?" he asked wearily. "I have displayed no curiosity. I don't ask for any explanations. I think I mentioned that the man had behaved insultingly to me—but that doesn't matter. I don't bring it up as a grievance. I am very well able to take care of myself. I have no wish to recur to the incident in any way. So far as I am concerned, the topic is dismissed."

"Listen to me!" broke in Alice, with eager gravity.

She hesitated, as he looked up with a nod of attention, and reflected as well as she was able among her thoughts for a minute or two. "This is what I want to say to you. Ever since we came to this hateful Octavius you and I have been drifting apart—or no, that doesn't express it—simply rushing away from each other. It only began last spring, and now the space between us is so wide that we are worse than complete strangers. For strangers at least don't hate each other, and I've had a good many occasions lately to see that you positively do hate me——"

"What grotesque absurdity!" interposed Theron impatiently.

"No, it isn't absurdity; it's gospel truth," retorted Alice. "And—don't interrupt me—there have been times, too, when I have had to ask myself if I wasn't getting almost to hate you in return. I tell you this frankly."

"Yes, you are undoubtedly frank," commented the husband, toying with his teaspoon—"a hypercritical person might consider, almost too frank."

Alice scanned his face closely while he spoke, and held her breath as if in expectant suspense. Her countenance clouded once more. "You don't realise, Theron," she said gravely. "Your voice when you speak to me, your look, your manner, they have all

changed. You are like another man—some man who never loved me, and doesn't even know me, much less like me. I want to know what the end of it is to be. Up to the time of your sickness last summer, until after the Soulsbys went away, I didn't let myself get downright discouraged. It seemed too monstrous for belief, that you should go away out of my life like that. It didn't seem possible that God could allow such a thing. It came to me that I had been lax in my Christian life, especially in my position as a minister's wife, and that this was my punishment. I went to the altar, to intercede with Him, and to try to loose my burden at His feet; but nothing has come of it. I got no help from you."

"Really, Alice," broke in Theron, "I explained over and over again to you how preoccupied I was—with the book—and affairs generally."

"I got no assistance from Heaven either," she went on, declining the diversion he offered. "I don't want to talk impiously, but if there is a God, He has forgotten me, His poor heart-broken hand-maiden."

"You *are* talking impiously, Alice," observed her husband; "and you are doing me cruel injustice, into the bargain."

"I only wish I were," she replied—"I only wish to God I were!"

"Well, then, accept my complete assurance that you *are*—that your whole conception of me, and of what you are pleased to describe as my change toward you, is an entire and utter mistake. Of course, the married state is no more exempt from the universal law of growth, development, alteration, than any other human institution. On its spiritual side, of course, viewed either as a sacrament, or as——"

"Don't let us go into that!" interposed Alice abruptly. "In fact, there is no good in talking any more at all. It is as if we didn't speak the same language. You don't understand what I say; it makes no impression upon your mind."

"Quite to the contrary," he assured her; "I have been deeply interested and concerned in all you have said. I think you are labouring under a great delusion, and I have tried my best to convince you of it; but I have never heard you speak more intelligibly, or, I might say, effectively."

A little gleam of softness stole over Alice's face. "If you only gave me a little more credit for intelligence," she said, "you would find that I am not such a block-head as you think I am."

"Come, come!" he said, with a smiling show of impatience; "you really mustn't impute things to me wholesale like that."

She was glad to answer the smile in kind. "No; but truly," she pleaded, "you don't realise it, but you have grown into a way of treating me as if I had absolutely no mind at all."

"You have a very admirable mind," he responded, and took up his teaspoon again. She reached for his cup, and poured out hot coffee for him. An almost cheerful spirit had suddenly descended upon the breakfast-table.

"And now let me say the thing I have been aching to say for months," she began, in a less burdened voice.

He lifted his brows. "Haven't things been discussed pretty fully already?" he asked.

The doubtful, harassed expression clouded upon her face at his words, and she paused. "No," she said resolutely, after an instant's reflection; "it is my duty to discuss this too. It is a misunderstanding all round. You remember that I told you Mr. Gorringe had given me some plants which he got from some garden or other?"

"If you really wish to go on with the subject—yes—I have a recollection of that particular falsehood of his."

"He did it with the kindest and friendliest motives in the world!" protested Alice. "He saw how down-

in-the-mouth and moping I was here, among these strangers—and I really was getting quite peaked and run down—and he said I stayed indoors too much, and it would do me all sorts of good to work in the garden, and he would send me some plants. The next I knew, here they were, with a book about mixing soils and planting, and so on. When I saw him next, and thanked him, I suppose I showed some apprehension about his having laid out money on them, and he, just to ease my mind, invented the story about his getting them for nothing. When I found out the truth—I got it out of that boy Harvey Semple—he admitted it quite frankly—said he was wrong to deceive me——”

“This was in the fine first fervour of his term of probation, I suppose,” put in Theron. He made no effort to dissemble the sneer in his voice.

“Well,” answered Alice, with a touch of acerbity, “I have told you now, and it is off my mind. There never would have been the slightest concealment about it, if you hadn’t begun by keeping me at arm’s length and making it next door to impossible to speak to you at all, and if——”

“And if he hadn’t lied.” Theron, as he finished her sentence for her, rose from the table. He dallied for a brief moment by his chair: there seemed the magnetic premonition in the air of some further and

kindlier word. Then he turned and walked sedately into the next room, and closed the door behind him. The talk was finished, and Alice, left alone, passed the knuckle of her thumb over one swimming eye and then the other, and bit her lips, and swallowed down the sob that rose in her throat.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was early afternoon when Theron walked out of his yard, bestowing no glance upon the withered and tarnished show of the garden, and started with a definite step down the street. The tendency to ruminative loitering, which those who saw him abroad always associated with his tall figure, was not suggested to-day. He moved forward like a man with a purpose.

All the forenoon, in the seclusion of the sitting-room, with a book opened before him, he had been thinking hard. It was not the talk with Alice that occupied his thoughts. This rose in his mind from time to time, but only as a disagreeable blur, and he refused to dwell upon it. It was nothing to him, he said to himself, what Gorringer's motives in lying had been. As for Alice, he hardened his heart against her. Just now it was her mood to try and make up to him; but it had been something different yesterday, and who could say what it would be to-morrow? He really had passed the limit of patience with her shifting, emotional vagaries, now lurching in this direction, now in that. She had had her chance to maintain a hold upon his interest

and imagination, and had let it slip. These were the accidents of life, the inevitable harsh happenings in the great tragedy of Nature. They could not be helped, and there was nothing more to be said.

He had bestowed much more attention upon what the priest had said the previous evening. He passed in review all the glowing tributes Father Forbes had paid to Celia. They warmed his senses as he recalled them; but they also, in a curious, indefinite way, caused him uneasiness. There had been a personal fervour about them which was something more than priestly. He remembered how the priest had turned pale and faltered when the question whether Celia would escape the common doom of her family came up. It was not a merely pastoral agitation that, he felt sure.

A hundred obscure hints, doubts, stray little suspicions, crowded upward together in his thoughts. It became apparent to him now that from the outset he had been conscious of something queer—yes, from that very first day when he saw the priest and Celia together, and noted their glance of recognition inside the house of death. He realised now, upon reflection, that the tone of other people, his own parishioners and his casual acquaintances in Octavius alike, had always had a certain note of reservation in it when it touched upon Miss Madden. Her running in and out of the pastorate

at all hours, the way the priest patted her on the shoulder before others, the obvious dislike the priest's ugly old housekeeper bore her, the astonishing freedom of their talk with each other—these dark memories loomed forth out of a mass of sinister conjecture.

He could bear the uncertainty no longer. Was it indeed not entirely his own fault that it had existed thus long? No man with the spirit of a mouse would have shilly-shallied in this preposterous fashion, week after week, with the fever of a beautiful woman's kiss in his blood, and the woman herself living only round the corner. The whole world had been as good as offered to him—a bewildering world of wealth and beauty, and spiritual exaltation and love; and he, like a weak fool, had waited for it to be brought to him, on a salver, as it were, and actually forced upon his acceptance! "That is my failing," he reflected; "these miserable ecclesiastical bandages of mine have dwarfed my manly side. The meanest of Thurston's clerks would have shown a more adventurous spirit and a bolder nerve. If I do not act at once, with courage and resolution, everything will be lost. Already she must think me unworthy of the honour it was in her sweet will to bestow." Then he remembered that she was now always at home. "Not another hour of foolish indecision!" he whispered to himself. "I will put my destiny to the test. I will see her to-day!"

A middle-aged, plain-faced servant answered his ring at the door-bell of the Madden mansion. She was palpably Irish, and looked at him with a saddened pre-occupation in her grey eyes, holding the door only a little ajar.

Theron had got out one of his cards. "I wish to make inquiry about young Mr. Madden—Mr. Michael Madden," he said, holding the card forth tentatively. "I have only just heard of his illness, and it has been a great grief to me."

"He is no better," answered the woman briefly.

"I am the Reverend Mr. Ware," he went on, "and you may say that if he is well enough I should be glad to see him."

The servant peered out at him with a suddenly altered expression, then shook her head. "I don't think he would be wishing to see *you*," she replied. It was evident from her tone that she suspected the visitor's intentions.

Theron smiled in spite of himself. "I have not come as a clergyman," he explained, "but as a friend of the family. If you will tell Miss Madden that I am here, it will do just as well. Yes—we won't bother him. If you will kindly hand my card to his sister."

When the domestic turned at this and went in,

Theron felt like throwing his hat in the air, there where he stood. The woman's churlish sectarian prejudices had played ideally into his hands. In no other imaginable way could he have asked for Celia so naturally. He wondered a little that a servant at such a grand house as this should leave callers standing on the doorstep. Still more he wondered what he should say to the lady of his dreams when he came into her presence.

"Will you please to walk this way?" The woman had returned. She closed the door noiselessly behind him, and led the way, not up the sumptuous staircase, as Theron had expected, but along through the broad hall, past several large doors, to a small curtained archway at the end. She pushed aside this *portière*, and Theron found himself in a sort of conservatory, full of the hot, vague light of sunshine falling through ground-glass. The air was moist and close, and heavy with the smell of verdure and wet earth. A tall bank of palms, with ferns sprawling at their base, reared itself directly in front of him. The floor was of mosaic, and he saw now that there were rugs upon it, and that there were chairs and sofas and other signs of habitation. It was, indeed, only half a green-house; for the lower part of it was in rosewood panels, with floral paintings on them, like a room.

Moving to one side of the barrier of palms, he dis-

covered, to his great surprise, the figure of Michael sitting propped up with pillows in a huge easy-chair. The sick man was looking at him, with big, gravely-intent eyes. His face did not show as much change as Theron had in fancy pictured. It had seemed almost as bony and cadaverous on the day of the picnic. The hands, spread out on the chair-arms, were very white and thin, though; and the gaze in the blue eyes had a spectral quality which disturbed him.

Michael raised his right hand, and Theron, stepping forward, took it limply in his for an instant. Then he laid it down again. The touch of people about to die had always been repugnant to him. He could feel on his own warm palm the very damp of the grave.

"I only heard from Father Forbes last evening of your—your ill-health," he said, somewhat hesitatingly. He seated himself on a bench beneath the palms, facing the invalid, but still holding his hat. "I hope very sincerely that you will soon be all right again."

"My sister is lying down in her room," answered Michael. He had not once taken his sombre and embarrassing gaze from the other's face. The voice in which he uttered this uncalled-for remark was thin in fibre, cold and impassive. It fell upon Theron's ears with a suggestion of hidden meaning. He looked uneasily into Michael's eyes, and then away again. They

seemed to be looking straight through him, and there was no shirking the sensation that they saw and comprehended things with an unnatural prescience.

"I hope she is feeling better," Theron found himself saying. "Father Forbes mentioned that she was a little under the weather. I dined with him last night."

"I am glad that you came," said Michael, after a little pause. His earnest, unblinking eyes seemed to supplement his tongue with speech of their own. "I do be thinking a great deal about you. I have matters to speak of to you, now that you are here."

Theron bowed his head gently, in token of grateful attention. He tried the experiment of looking away from Michael; but his glance went back again irresistibly, and fastened itself upon the sick man's gaze and clung there.

"I am next door to a dead man," he went on, paying no heed to the other's deprecatory gesture. "It is not years or months with me, but weeks. Then I go away to stand up for judgment on my sins, and some time, if it is His merciful will, I shall see God. So I say my good-byes now, and so you will let me speak plainly, and not think ill of what I say. You are much changed, Mr. Ware, since you came to Octavius, and it is not a change for the good."

Theron lifted his brows in unaffected surprise, and put inquiry into his glance.

"I don't know if Protestants will be saved, in God's good time, or not," continued Michael. "I find there are different opinions among the clergy about that, and of course it is not for me, only a plain mechanic, to be sure where learned and pious scholars are in doubt. But I am sure about one thing—those Protestants, and others too, mind you, who profess and preach good deeds, and themselves do bad deeds, they will never be saved; they will have no chance at all to escape hell-fire."

"I think we are all agreed upon that, Mr. Madden," said Theron, with surface suavity.

"Then I say to you, Mr. Ware, you are yourself in a bad path. Take the warning of a dying man, sir, and turn from it!"

The impulse to smile tugged at Theron's facial muscles; this was really too droll. He looked up at the ceiling the while he forced his countenance into a polite composure, then turned again to Michael with some conciliatory commonplace ready for utterance. But he said nothing; and all suggestion of levity left his mind under the searching inspection bent upon him by the young man's hollow eyes. What did Michael suspect? What did he know? What was he hinting at in this strange talk of his?

"I saw you often on the street when first you came here," continued Michael. "I knew the man who was here before you—that is, by sight—and he was not a good man. But your face, when you came, pleased me; I liked to look at you. I was tormented just then, do you see, that so many decent, kindly people, old schoolmates and friends and neighbours of mine, and, for that matter, others all over the country, must lose their souls because they were Protestants. All my boyhood and young manhood, that thought took the joy out of me. Sometimes I usen't to sleep a whole night long for thinking that some lad I had been playing with, perhaps in his own house that very day, would be taken when he died—and his mother, too, when she died—and thrown into the flames of hell for all eternity. It made me so unhappy that finally I wouldn't go to any Protestant boy's house, and have his mother be nice to me, and give me cake and apples, and me thinking all the while that they were bound to be damned, no matter how good they were to me."

The primitive humanity of this touched Theron, and he nodded approbation with a tender smile in his eyes, forgetting for the moment that a personal application of the monologue had been hinted at.

"But then later, as I grew up," the sick man went on, "I learned that it was not altogether certain. Some of the authorities, I found, maintained that it was doubt-

ful, and some said openly that there must be salvation possible for good people who lived in ignorance of the truth through no fault of their own. Then I had hope one day, and no hope the next; and as I did my work I thought it over, and in the evenings my father and I talked it over, and we settled nothing of it at all. Of course, how could we?"

"Did you ever discuss the question with your sister?" it occurred suddenly to Theron to interpose. He was conscious of some daring in doing so, and he fancied that Michael's drawn face clouded a little at his words.

"My sister is no theologian," he answered briefly. "Women have no call to meddle with such matters. But I was saying—it was in the middle of these doubtings of mine that you came here to Octavius, and I noticed you on the streets; and once in the evening—I made no secret of it to my people—I sat in the back of your church and heard you preach. As I say, I liked you. It was your face, and what I thought it showed of the man underneath it, that helped settle my mind more than anything else. I said to myself, 'Here is a young man, only about my own age, and he has education and talents, and he does not seek to make money for himself, or a great name; but he is content to live humbly on the salary of a book-keeper, and devote all his time to prayer, and the meditation of his

religion, and preaching, and visiting the sick and the poor and comforting them. His very face is a pleasure and a help for those in suffering and trouble to look at. The mere sight of it makes one believe in pure thoughts and merciful deeds. I will not credit it that God intends damning such a man as that, or any like him!”

Theron bowed, with a slow, hesitating gravity of manner, and deep, not wholly complacent, attention on his face. Evidently all this was by way of preparation for something unpleasant.

“That was only last spring,” said Michael. His tired voice sank for a sentence or two into a meditative half-whisper. “And it was *my* last spring of all. I shall not be growing weak any more, or drawing hard breaths, when the first warm weather comes. It will be one season to me hereafter—always the same.” He lifted his voice, with perceptible effort. “I am talking too much. The rest I can say in a word. Only half a year has gone by, and you have another face on you entirely. I had noticed the small changes before, one by one. I saw the great change, all of a sudden, the day of the picnic. I see it a hundred times more now, as you sit there. If it seemed to me like the face of a saint before, it is more like the face of a bar-keeper now!”

This was quite too much. Theron rose, flushed to

the temples, and scowled down at the helpless man in the chair. He swallowed the sharp words which came uppermost, and bit and moistened his lips as he forced himself to remember that this was a dying man, and Celia's brother, to whom she was devoted, and whom he himself felt he wanted to be very fond of. He got the shadow of a smile on to his countenance.

"I fear you *have* tired yourself unduly," he said, in as non-contentious a tone as he could manage. He even contrived a little deprecatory laugh. "I am afraid your real quarrel is with the air of Octavius. It agrees with me so wonderfully, I am getting as fat as a seal. But I do hope I am not paying for it by such a wholesale deterioration inside. If my own opinion could be of any value, I should assure you that I feel myself an infinitely better and broader and stronger man than I was when I came here."

Michael shook his head dogmatically. "That is the greatest pity of all," he said, with renewed earnestness. "You are entirely deceived about yourself. You do not at all realise how you have altered your direction, or where you are going. It was a great misfortune for you, sir, that you did not keep among your own people. That poor half-brother of mine, though the drink was in him when he said that same to you, never spoke a truer word. Keep among your own people, Mr. Ware! When you go among others—you know what I refer to—you

have no proper understanding of what their sayings and doings really mean. You do not realise that they are held up by the power of the true Church, as a little child learning to walk is held up with a belt by its nurse. They can say and do things, and no harm at all come to them, which would mean destruction to you, because they have help, and you are walking alone. And so be said by me, Mr. Ware! Go back to the way you were brought up in, and leave alone the people whose ways are different from yours. You are a married man, and you are the preacher of a religion, such as it is. There can be nothing better for you than to go and strive to be a good husband, and to set a good example to the people of your church, who look up to you—and mix yourself up no more with outside people and outside notions that only do you mischief. And that is what I wanted to say to you.”

Theron took up his hat. “I take in all kindness what you have felt it your duty to say to me, Mr. Madden,” he said. “I am not sure that I have altogether followed you, but I am very sure you mean it well.”

“I mean well by you,” replied Michael, wearily moving his head on the pillow, and speaking in an undertone of languor and pain, “and I mean well by others, that are nearer to me, and that I have a right to care more about. When a man lies by the side of his

open grave he does not be meaning ill to any human soul."

"Yes—thanks—quite so!" faltered Theron. He dallied for an instant with the temptation to seek some further explanation, but the sight of Michael's half-closed eyes and worn-out expression decided him against it. It did not seem to be expected either that he should shake hands, and with a few perfunctory words of hope for the invalid's recovery, which fell with a jarring note of falsehood upon his own ears, he turned and left the room. As he did so Michael touched a bell on the table beside him.

Theron drew a long breath in the hall as the curtain fell behind him. It was an immense relief to escape from the oppressive humidity and heat of the flower-room, and from that ridiculous bore of a Michael as well.

The middle-aged, grave-faced servant, warned by the bell, stood waiting to conduct him to the door.

"I am sorry to have missed Miss Madden," he said to her. "She must be quite worn out. Perhaps later in the day——"

"She will not be seeing anybody the day," returned the woman. "She is going to New York this evening, and she is taking some rest against the journey."

"Will she be away long?" he asked mechanically.

The servant's answer, "I have no idea," hardly penetrated his consciousness at all.

He moved down the steps and along the gravel to the street in a maze of mental confusion. When he reached the side-walk, under the familiar elms, he paused, and made a definite effort to pull his thoughts together and take stock of what had happened, of what was going to happen, but the thing baffled him. It was as if some drug had stupefied his faculties.

He began to walk, and gradually saw that what his mind stumbled at was the fact of Celia's departure for New York that evening. He stared at this fact, at first in its nakedness, then clothed with reassuring suggestions that this was no doubt a trip she very often made. There was a blind sense of comfort in this idea, and he rested himself upon it. Yes, of course, she travelled a great deal. New York must be as familiar to her as Octavius was to him. Her going there now was quite a matter of course—the most natural thing in the world.

Then there burst suddenly uppermost in his brain the other fact, that Father Forbes was also going to New York that evening. The two things spindled upward, side by side, yet separately, in his mental vision; then they twisted and twined themselves together. He followed their convolutions miserably, walking as if his eyes were shut.

In slow fashion matters defined and arranged themselves before him. The process of tracing their sequence was all torture, but there was no possibility, no notion, of shirking any detail of the pain. The priest had spoken of his efforts to persuade Celia to go away for a few days, for rest and change of air and scene. He must have known only too well that she was going, but of that he had been careful to drop no hint. The possibility of accident was too slight to be worth considering. People on such intimate terms as Celia and the priest, people with such facilities for seeing each other whenever they desired, did not find themselves on the same train of cars, with the same long journey in view, by mere chance.

Theron walked until dusk began to close in upon the autumn day. It grew colder as he turned his face homeward. He wondered if it would freeze again overnight, and then remembered the shrivelled flowers in his wife's garden. For a moment they shaped themselves in a picture before his mind's eye; he saw their blackened foliage, their sicklied, drooping stalks and wilted blooms, and as he looked they restored themselves to the vigour and grace and richness of colour of summer-time, as vividly as if they had been painted on a canvas. Or no, the picture he stared at was not on canvas, but on the glossy, varnished panel of a luxurious sleeping-car. He shook his head angrily, and blinked his eyes again

and again to prevent their seeing, seated together in the open window above this panel, the two people he knew were there, gloved and habited for the night's journey, waiting for the train to start.

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“Very much to my surprise,” he found himself saying to Alice, watching her nervously as she laid the supper-table, “I find I must go to Albany to-night. That is, it isn't absolutely necessary, for that matter, but I think it may easily turn out to be greatly to my advantage to go. Something has arisen—I can't speak about it as yet—but the sooner I see the Bishop about it the better. Things like that occur in a man's life, where boldly striking out a line of action, and following it up without an instant's delay, may make all the difference in the world to him. To-morrow it might be too late; and, besides, I can be home the sooner again.”

Alice's face showed surprise, but no trace of suspicion. She spoke with studied amiability during the meal, and deferred with such unexpected tact to his implied desire not to be questioned as to the mysterious motives of the journey, that his mood instinctively softened and warmed toward her as they finished supper.

He smiled a little. “I do hope I shan't have to go on to-morrow to New York; but these Bishops of ours

are such gad-about, one never knows where to catch them. As like as not Sanderson may be down in New York on Book Concern business or something, and if he is I shall have to chase him up. But, after all, perhaps the trip will do me good—the change of air and scene, you know.”

“I’m sure I hope so,” said Alice, honestly enough. “If you do go on to New York, I suppose you’ll go by the riverboat. Everybody talks so much of that beautiful sail down the Hudson.”

“That’s an idea!” exclaimed Theron, welcoming it with enthusiasm. “It hadn’t occurred to me. If I do have to go, and it is as lovely as they make out, the next time I promise I won’t go without you, my girl. I *have* been rather out of sorts lately,” he continued. “When I come back I dare say I shall be feeling better, more like my old self. Then I’m going to try, Alice, to be nicer to you than I have been of late. I’m afraid there was only too much truth in what you said this morning.”

“Never mind what I said this morning, or any other time,” broke in Alice softly. “Don’t ever remember it again, Theron, if only—only——”

He rose as she spoke, moved round the table to where she sat, and bending over her, stopped the faltering sentence with a kiss. When was it, he won-

dered, that he had last kissed her? It seemed years, ages ago.

An hour later, with hat and overcoat on, and his valise in his hand, he stood on the doorstep of the parsonage, and kissed her once more before he turned and descended into the darkness. He felt like whistling as his feet sounded firmly on the plank side-walk beyond the gate. It seemed as if he had never been in such capital good spirits before in his life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE train was at a standstill somewhere, and the dull, ashen beginnings of daylight had made a first feeble start toward effacing the lamps on the car roof, when the new day opened for Theron. A man who had just come in stopped at the seat upon which he had been stretched through the night, and tapping him brusquely on the knee, said, "I'm afraid I must trouble you, sir." After a moment of sleep-burdened confusion he sat up, and the man took the other half of the seat, and opened a newspaper still damp from the press. It was morning, then.

Theron rubbed a clear space upon the clouded window with his thumb and looked out. There was nothing to be seen but a broad stretch of tracks, and beyond this the shadowed outlines of waggons and machinery in a yard, with a background of factory buildings.

The atmosphere in the car was vile beyond belief. He thought of opening the window, but feared that the peremptory-looking man with the paper, who had wakened him and made him sit up, might object. They

were the only people in the car who were sitting up. Backwards and forwards, on either side of the narrow aisle, the dim light disclosed recumbent forms, curled uncomfortably into corners, or sprawling at difficult angles which involved the least interference with one another. Here and there an upturned face gave a livid patch of surface for the mingled play of the grey dawn and the yellow lamplight. A ceaseless noise of snoring was in the air.

He got up and walked to the tank of ice-water at the end of the aisle, and took a drink from the most inaccessible portion of the common tin cup's rim. The happy idea of going out on the platform struck him, and he acted upon it. The morning air was deliciously cool and fresh by contrast, and he filled his lungs with it again and again. Standing here, he could discern beyond the buildings to the right the faint purplish outlines of great rounded hills. Some workmen, one of them bearing a torch, were crouching along under the side of the train, pounding upon the resonant wheels with small hammers. He recalled having heard the same sound in the watches of the night, during a prolonged halt. Someone had then said it was Albany. He smiled in spite of himself at the thought that Bishop Sanderson would never know about the visit he had missed.

Swinging himself to the ground, he bent sidewise

and looked forward down the long train. There were five, six, perhaps more, sleeping-cars on in front. Which one of them, he wondered—and then there came the sharp “All aboard!” from the other side, and he bundled up the steps again and entered the car as the train slowly resumed its progress.

He was wide awake now, and quite at his ease. He took his seat, and diverted himself by winking gravely at a little child facing him on the next seat but one. There were four other children in the family party, encamped about the tired and still sleeping mother, whose back was turned to Theron. He recalled now having noticed this poor woman last night, in the first stage of his journey—how she fed her brood from one of the numerous baskets piled under their feet, and brought water in a tin dish of her own from the tank to use in washing their faces with a rag, and loosened their clothes to dispose them for the night’s sleep. The face of the woman, her manner and slatternly aspect, and the general effect of her belongings bespoke squalid ignorance and poverty. Watching her, Theron had felt curiously interested in the performance. In one sense, it was scarcely more human than the spectacle of a cat licking her kittens or a cow giving suck to her calf. Yet, in another, was there anything more human?

The child who had wakened before the rest re-

garded him with placidity, declining to be amused by his winkings, but exhibiting no other emotion. She had been playing by herself with a couple of buttons tied on a string, and after giving a civil amount of attention to Theron's grimaces, she turned again to the superior attractions of this toy. Her self-possession, her capacity for self-entertainment, the care she took not to arouse the others, all impressed him very much. He felt in his pocket for a small coin, and reaching forward, offered it to her. She took it calmly, bestowed a tranquil gaze upon him for a moment, and went back to the buttons. Her indifference produced an unpleasant sensation upon him somehow, and he rubbed the steaming window clear again and stared out of it.

The wide river lay before him, flanked by a precipitous wall of cliffs which he knew instantly must be the Palisades. There was an avertisement painted on them, which he tried in vain to read. He was surprised to find they interested him so slightly. He had heard all his life of the Hudson, and especially of it just at this point. The reality seemed to him almost commonplace. His failure to be thrilled depressed him for the moment.

"I suppose those *are* the Palisades?" he asked his neighbour.

The man glanced up from his paper, nodded, and made as if to resume his reading. But his eye had

caught something in the prospect through the window which arrested his attention. "By George!" he exclaimed, and lifted himself to get a clearer view.

"What is it?" asked Theron, peering forth as well.

"Nothing; only Barclay Wendover's yacht is still there. There's been a hitch of some sort. They were to have left yesterday."

"Is that it—that long black thing?" queried Theron. "That can't be a yacht, can it?"

"What do you think it is?" answered the other. They were looking at a slim, narrow hull, lying at anchor silent and motionless on the drab expanse of water. "If that ain't a yacht, they haven't begun building any yet. They're taking her over to the Mediterranean for a cruise, you know—around India and Japan for the winter, and home by the South Sea Islands. Friend o' mine's in the party. Wouldn't mind the trip myself."

"But do you mean to say," asked Theron, "that that little shell of a thing can sail across the ocean? Why, how many people would she hold?"

The man laughed. "Well," he said, "there's room for two sets of quadrilles in the chief saloon, if the rest keep their legs well up on the sofas. But there's only ten or a dozen in the party this time. More than that

rather get in one another's way, especially with so many ladies on board."

Theron asked no more questions, but bent his head to see the last of this wonderful craft. The sight of it, and what he had heard about it, suddenly gave point and focus to his thoughts. He knew at last what it was that had lurked, formless and undesignated, these many days in the background of his dreams. The picture rose in his mind now of Celia as the mistress of a yacht. He could see her reclining in a low easy-chair upon the polished deck, with the big white sails billowing behind her, and the sun shining upon the deep blue waves, and glistening through the splash of spray in the air, and weaving a halo of glowing gold about her fair head. Ah, how the tender visions crowded now upon him! Eternal summer basked round this enchanted yacht of his fancy—summer sought now in Scottish firths or Norwegian fiords, nod in quaint old Southern harbours, ablaze with the hues of strange costumes and half-tropical flowers and fruits, now in far-away Oriental bays and lagoons, or among the coral reefs and palm-trees of the luxurious Pacific. He dwelt upon these new imaginings with the fervid longing of an inland-born boy. Every vague yearning he had ever felt toward salt water stirred again in his blood at the thought of the sea—with Celia.

Why not? She had never visited any foreign land.

"Some time," she had said; "some time no doubt I will." He could hear again the wistful, musing tone of her voice. The thought had fascinations for her, it was clear. How irresistibly would it not appeal to her, presented with the added charm of a roving, vagrant independence on the high seas, free to speed in her snow-winged chariot wherever she willed over the deep, loitering in this place, or up-helm-and-away to another, with no more care or weight of responsibility than the gulls tossing through the air in her wake!

Theron felt, rather than phrased to himself, that there would not be "ten or a dozen in the party" on that yacht. Without defining anything in his mind, he breathed in fancy the same bold ocean breeze which filled the sails and toyed with Celia's hair; he looked with her, as she sat by the rail, and saw the same waves racing past, the same vast dome of cloud and ether that were mirrored in her brown eyes. And there was no one else anywhere near them. Even the men in sailors' clothes, who would be pulling at ropes or climbing up tarred ladders, kept themselves considerably outside the picture. Only Celia sat there, and at her feet, gazing up again into her face as in the forest, the man whose being had been consecrated to her service, her worship, by the kiss.

"You've passed it now. I was trying to point out

the Jumel House to you—where Aaron Burr lived, you know.”

Theron roused himself from his day-dream, and nodded with a confused smile at his neighbour. “Thanks,” he faltered; “I didn’t hear you. The train makes such a noise, and I must have been dozing.”

He looked about him. The night aspect, as of a tramp’s lodging-house, had quite disappeared from the car. Everybody was sitting up, and the more impatient were beginning to collect their bundles and handbags from the racks and floor. An expressman came through, jangling a huge bunch of brass checks on leathern thongs over his arm, and held parley with passengers along the aisle. Outside, citified streets, with stores and factories, were alternating in the moving panorama with open fields; and even as he looked these vacant spaces ceased altogether, and successive regular lines of pavement, between two tall rows of houses all alike, began to stretch out, wheel to the right, and swing off out of view, for all the world like the avenues of hop-poles he remembered as a boy. There was a long tunnel, its darkness broken at stated intervals by brief bursts of daylight from overhead, and out of this all at once the train drew up its full length in some vast, vaguely lighted enclosure, and stopped.

"Yes, this is New York," said the man, folding up his paper and springing to his feet. The narrow aisle was filled with many others who had been prompter still, and Theron stood, bag in hand, waiting till this energetic throng should have pushed itself bodily past him, forth from the car. Then he himself made his way out, drifting with a sense of helplessness in their resolute wake. There rose in his mind the sudden conviction that he would be too late. All the passengers in the forward sleepers would be gone before he could get there. Yet even this terror gave him no new power to get ahead of anybody else in the tightly packed mass.

Once on the broad platform, the others started off briskly; they all seemed to know just where they wanted to go, and to feel that no instant of time was to be lost in getting there. Theron himself caught some of this urgent spirit, and hurled himself along in the throng with reckless haste, knocking his bag against people's legs, but never pausing for apology or comment, until he found himself abreast of the locomotive at the head of the train. He drew aside from the main current here, and began searching the platform, far and near, for those he had travelled so far to find.

The platform emptied itself. Theron lingered on in puzzled hesitation, and looked about him. In the

whole immense station, with its acres of tracks and footways, and its incessantly shifting processions of people, there was visible nobody else who seemed also in doubt, or who appeared capable of sympathising with indecision in any form. Another train came in, some way over to the right, and before it had fairly stopped swarms of eager men began boiling out of each end of each car, literally precipitating themselves over one another, it seemed to Theron, in their excited dash down the steps. As they caught their footing below they started racing pell-mell down the platform to its end; there he saw them, looking more than ever in the distance like clustered bees, struggling vehemently in a dense mass up a staircase in the remote corner of the building.

“What are those folks running for? Is there a fire?” he asked an amiable-faced young mulatto, in the uniform of the sleeping-car service, who passed him with some light handbags.

“No; they’s Harlem people, I guess, jes’ catchin’ the Elevated—that’s all, sir,” he answered obligingly.

At the moment some passengers emerged slowly from one of the sleeping-cars, and walked in a leisurely way toward him.

“Why, are there people still in these cars?” he asked eagerly. “Haven’t they all gone?”

"Some has, some ain't," the porter replied. "They most generally take their time about it. They ain't no hurry, so long's they get out 'fore we're drawn round to the drill-yard."

There was still hope, then. Theron took up his bag and walked forward, intent upon finding some place from which he could watch unobserved the belated stragglers issuing from the sleeping-cars. He started back, all at once confronted by a semicircle of violent men with whips and badges, who stunned his hearing by a sudden vociferous outburst of shouts and yells. They made furious gestures at him with their whips and fists, to enforce the incoherent babel of their voices, and in these gestures, as in their faces and cries, there seemed a great deal of menace and very little invitation. There was a big policeman sauntering near by, and Theron got the idea that it was his presence alone which protected him from open violence at the hands of these savage hackmen. He tightened his clutch on his valise, and turning his back on them and their uproar, tried to brave it out and stand where he was. But the policeman came lounging slowly toward him, with such authority in his swaying gait, and such urban omniscience written all over his broad, sandy face, that he lost heart, and beat an abrupt retreat off to the right, where there were a number of doorways, near

which other people had ventured to put down baggage on the floor.

Here, somewhat screened from observation, he stood for a long time, watching at odd moments the ceaselessly varying phases of the strange scene about him, but always keeping an eye on the train he had himself arrived in. It was slow and dispiriting work. A dozen times his heart failed him, and he said to himself mournfully that he had had his journey for nothing. Then some new figure would appear, alighting from the steps of a sleeper, and hope revived in his breast.

At last, when over half-an-hour of expectancy had been marked off by the big clock overhead, his suspense came to an end. He saw Father Forbes' erect and substantial form standing on the car platform nearest of all, balancing himself with his white hands on the rail, waiting for something. Then after a little he came down, followed by a black porter, whose arms were burdened by numerous bags and parcels. The two stood a minute or so more in hesitation at the side of the steps. Then Celia descended, and the three advanced.

The importance of not being discovered was uppermost in Theron's mind, now that he saw them actually coming toward him. He had avoided this the previous

evening, in the Octavius dépôt, with some skill, he flattered himself. It gave him a pleasurable sense of being a man of affairs, almost a detective, to be confronted by the necessity now of baffling observation once again. He was still rather without plans for keeping them in view once they left the station. He had supposed that he would be able to hear what hotel they directed their driver to take them to, and, failing that, he had fostered a notion, based upon a story he had read when a boy, of throwing himself into another carriage and bidding his driver to pursue them in hot haste, and on his life not fail to track them down. These devices seemed somewhat empty, now that the urgent moment was at hand, and as he drew back behind some other loiterers out of view, he sharply racked his wits for some way of coping with this most pressing problem.

It turned out, however, that there was no difficulty at all. Father Forbes and Celia seemed to have no use for the hackmen, but moved straight forward toward the street, through the doorway next to that in which Theron cowered. He stole round, and followed them at a safe distance, making Celia's hat, and the port-manteau perched on the shoulder of the porter behind her, his guides. To his surprise, they still kept on their course when they had reached the side-walk, and went over the pavement across an open square which spread

itself directly in front of the station. Hanging as far behind as he dared, he saw them pass to the other side-walk diagonally opposite, proceed for a block or so along this, and then separate at a corner. Celia and the negro lad went down a side street and entered the door of a vast, tall, red-brick building which occupied the whole block. The priest, turning on his heel, came back again and went boldly up the broad steps of the front entrance to this same structure, which Theron now discovered to be the Murray Hill Hotel.

Fortune had indeed favoured him. He not only knew where they were, but he had been himself a witness to the furtive way in which they entered the house by different doors. Nothing in his own limited experience of hotels helped him to comprehend the notion of a separate entrance for ladies and their luggage. He did not feel quite sure in his own mind about the significance of what he had observed. But it was apparent to him that there was something underhand in it all.

After lingering awhile on the steps of the hotel, and satisfying himself by peeps through the glass doors that the coast was clear, he ventured inside. The great corridor contained many people, coming, going, or standing about, but none of them paid any attention to him. At last he made up his mind, and beckoned a coloured

boy to him from a group gathered in the shadows of the big central staircase. Explaining that he did not at that moment wish a room, but desired to leave his bag, the boy took him to a cloak-room, and got him a check for the thing. With this in his pocket he felt himself more at his ease, and turned to walk away. Then suddenly he wheeled, and bending his body over the counter of the cloak-room, astonished the attendant inside by the eagerness with which he scrutinised the piled rows of portmanteaus, trunks, overcoats, and bundles in the little enclosure.

"What is it you want? Here's your bag, if you're looking for that," this man said to him.

"No, thanks; it's nothing," replied Theron, straightening himself again. He had had a narrow escape. Father Forbes and Celia, walking side by side, had come down the small passage in which he stood, and had passed him so closely that he had felt her dress brush against him. Fortunately he had seen them in time, and by throwing himself half into the cloak-room had rendered recognition impossible.

He walked now in the direction they had taken, till he came to the polite coloured man at an open door on the left, who was bowing people into the breakfast-room. Standing in the doorway, he looked about him till his eye lighted upon his two friends, seated at a

small table by a distant window, with a black waiter, card in hand, bending over in consultation with them.

Returning to the corridor, he made bold now to march up to the desk and examine the register. The priest's name was not there. He found only the brief entry, "Miss Madden, Octavius," written, not by her, but by Father Forbes. On the line were two numbers in pencil, with an "and" between them. An indirect question to one of the clerks helped him to an explanation of this. When there were two numbers it meant that the guest in question had a parlour as well as a bedroom.

Here he drew a long, satisfied breath and turned away. The first half of his quest stood completed, and that much more fully and easily than he had dared to hope. He could not but feel a certain new respect for himself as a man of resource and energy. He had demonstrated that people could not fool him with impunity.

It remained to decide what he would do with his discovery, now that it had been so satisfactorily made. As yet he had given this hardly a thought. Even now it did not thrust itself forward as a thing demanding instant attention. It was much more important, first of all, to get a good breakfast. He had learned that

there was another and less formal eating-place downstairs, in the basement by the bar, with an entrance from the street. He walked down by the inner stairway instead, feeling himself already at home in the big hotel. He ordered an ample breakfast, and came out while it was being served to wash and have his boots blacked, and he gave the man a quarter of a dollar. His pockets were filled with silver quarters, half-dollars, and dollars almost to a burdensome point, and in his valise was a bag full of smaller change, including many rolls of copper cents which Alice always counted and packaged up on Mondays. In the hurry of leaving he had brought with him the church collections for the past two weeks. It occurred to him that he must keep a strict account of his expenditure. Meanwhile he gave ten cents to another man in a silk-sleeved cardigan jacket, who had merely stood by and looked at him while his boots were being polished. There was a sense of metropolitan affluence in the very atmosphere.

The little table in the adjoining room, on which Theron found his meal in waiting for him, seemed a vision of delicate napery and refined appointments in his eyes. He was wolfishly hungry, and the dishes he looked upon gave him back assurances by sight and smell that he was very happy as well. The servant in attendance had an extremely white apron and a kindly

black face. He bowed when Theron looked at him, with the air of a lifelong admirer and humble friend.

"I suppose you'll have claret with your breakfast, sir?" he remarked, as if it were a matter of course.

"Why, certainly," answered Theron, stretching his legs contentedly under the table and tucking the corner of his napkin in his neckband. "Certainly, my good man."

CHAPTER XXX.

AT ten o'clock Theron, loitering near the bookstall in the corridor, saw Father Forbes come downstairs, pass out through the big front door, get into a carriage, and drive away.

This relieved him of a certain sense of responsibility, and he retired to a corner sofa and sat down. The detective side of him being off duty, so to speak, there was leisure at last for reflection upon the other aspects of his mission. Yes, it was high time for him to consider what he should do next.

It was easier to recognise this fact, however, than to act upon it. His mind was full of tricky devices for eluding this task of serious thought which he sought to impose upon it. It seemed so much pleasanter not to think at all, but just to drift. He found himself watching with envy the men who, as they came out from their breakfast, walked over to the bookstall and bought cigars from the row of boxes nestling there among the newspaper piles. They had such evident delight in the work of selection; they took off the ends of the cigars so carefully, and lighted them with such meditative at-

tention—he could see that he was woefully handicapped by not knowing how to smoke. He had had the most wonderful breakfast of his life, but even in the consciousness of comfortable repletion which pervaded his being there was an obstinate sense of something lacking. No doubt a good cigar was the thing needed to round out the perfection of such a breakfast. He half rose once, fired by a sudden resolution to go over and get one. But of course that was nonsense; it would only make him sick. He sat down, and determinedly set himself so thinking.

The effort finally brought fruit—and of a kind which gave him a very unhappy quarter of an hour. The lover part of him was uppermost now, insistently exposing all its raw surfaces to the stings and scalds of jealousy. Up to this moment his brain had always evaded the direct question of how he and the priest relatively stood in Celia's estimation. It forced itself remorselessly upon him now, and his thoughts, so far from shirking the ugly subject, seemed to advance to meet it. It was extremely unpleasant, all this.

But then a calmer view asserted itself. Why go out of his way to invent anguish for himself? The relations between Celia and the priest, whatever they might be, were certainly of old standing. They had begun before his time. His own romance was a more recent affair, and must take its place, of course, subject to

existing conditions. It was all right for him to come to New York and satisfy his legitimate curiosity as to the exact character and scope of these conditions. But it was foolish to pretend to be amazed or dismayed at the discovery of their existence. They were a part of the situation which he, with his eyes wide open, had accepted. It was his function to triumph over them, to supplant them, to rear the edifice of his own victorious passion upon their ruins. It was to this that Celia's kiss had invited him. It was for this that he had come to New York. To let his purpose be hampered or thwarted now by childish doubts and jealousies would be ridiculous.

He rose, and holding himself very erect, walked with measured deliberation across the corridor and up the broad staircase. There was an elevator near at hand, he had noticed, but he preferred the stairs. One or two of the coloured boys clustered about the foot of the stairs looked at him, and he had a moment of dreadful apprehension lest they should stop his progress. Nothing was said, and he went on. The numbers on the first floor were not what he wanted, and after some wandering about he ascended to the next, and then to the third. Every now and then he encountered attendants, but intuitively he bore himself with an air of knowing what he was about which protected him from inquiry.

Finally he came upon the hallway he sought. Passing along, he found the doors bearing the numbers he had memorised so well. They were quite close together, and there was nothing to help him guess which belonged to the parlour. He hesitated, gazing wistfully from one to the other. In the instant of indecision, even while his alert ear caught the sound of feet coming along toward the passage in which he stood, a thought came to quicken his resolve. It became apparent to him that his discovery gave him a certain new measure of freedom with Celia, a sort of right to take things more for granted than heretofore. He chose a door at random, and rapped distinctly on the panel.

“Come!”

The voice he knew for Celia's. The single word, however, recalled the usage of Father Forbes, which he had noted more than once at the pastorate, when Maggie had knocked.

He straightened his shoulders, took his hat off, and pushed open the door. It *was* the parlour—a room of sofas, pianos, big easy-chairs, and luxurious bric-a-brac. A tall woman was walking up and down in it with bowed head. Her back was at the moment toward him, and he looked at her, saying to himself that this was the lady of his dreams, the enchantress of the kiss,

the woman who loved him—but somehow it did not seem to his senses to be Celia.

She turned, and moved a step or two in his direction before she mechanically lifted her eyes and saw who was standing in her doorway. She stopped short and regarded him. Her face was in the shadow, and he could make out nothing of its expression, save that there was a general effect of gravity about it.

“I cannot receive you,” she said. “You must go away. You have no business to come like this without sending up your card.”

Theron smiled at her. The notion of taking in earnest her inhospitable words did not at all occur to him. He could see now that her face had vexed and saddened lines upon it, and the sharpness of her tone remained in his ears. But he smiled again gently to reassure her.

“I ought to have sent up my name, I know,” he said, “but I couldn’t bear to wait. I just saw your name on the register, and—you *will* forgive me, won’t you?—I ran to you at once. I know you won’t have the heart to send me away!”

She stood where she had halted, her arms behind her, looking him fixedly in the face. He had made a movement to advance and offer his hand in greeting, but her posture checked the impulse. His courage began to falter under her inspection.

"Must I really go down again?" he pleaded. "It's a crushing penalty to suffer for such a little indiscretion. I was so excited to find you were here, I never stopped to think. Don't send me away—please don't!"

Celia raised her head. "Well, shut the door then," she said, "since you are so anxious to stay. You would have done much better, though, very much better indeed, to have taken the hint and gone away."

"Will you shake hands with me, Celia?" he asked softly as he came near her.

"Sit there, please!" she made answer, indicating a chair in the middle of the room. He obeyed her, but to his surprise, instead of seating herself as well, she began walking up and down the length of the floor again. After a turn or two she stopped in front of him and looked him full in the eye. The light from the windows was on her countenance now, and its revelations vaguely troubled him. It was a Celia he had never seen before who confronted him.

"I am much occupied by other matters," she said, speaking with cold impassivity, "but still I find myself curious to know just what limits you set to your dishonesty."

Theron stared up at her. His lips quivered, but no speech came to them. If this was all merely fond playfulness, it might be carried to a heart-aching point.

"I saw you hiding about in the depôt at home last evening," she went on. "You come up here pretending to have discovered me by accident, but I saw you following me from the Grand Central this morning."

"Yes, I did both these things," said Theron boldly. A fine bravery tingled in his veins all at once. He looked into her face, and found the spirit to disregard its frowning aspect. "Yes, I did them!" he repeated defiantly. "That is not the hundredth part, or the thousandth part, of what I would do for your sake. I have got way beyond caring for any consequences. Position, reputation, the good opinion of fools—what are they? Life itself—what does it amount to? Nothing at all—with you in the balance!"

"Yes—but I am not in the balance," observed Celia quietly. "That is where you have made your mistake."

Theron laid aside his hat. Women were curious creatures, he reflected. Some were susceptible to one line of treatment, some to another. His own reading of Celia had always been that she liked opposition, of a smart, rattling, almost cheeky sort. One got on best with her by saying bright things. He searched his brain now for some clever quip that would strike sparks from the adamantine mood which for the moment it was her whim to assume. To cover the process he smiled a little. Then her beauty, as she stood before him, her

queenly form clad in a more stiffly fashionable dress than he had seen her wearing before, appealed afresh and overwhelmingly to him. He rose to his feet.

"Have you forgotten our talk in the woods?" he murmured with a wooing note. "Have you forgotten the kiss?"

She shook her head calmly. "I have forgotten nothing."

"Then why play with me so cruelly now?" he went on, in a voice of tender deprecation. "I know you don't mean it, but all the same it bruises my heart a little. I build myself so wholly upon you, I have made existence itself depend so completely upon your smile, upon a soft glance in your eyes, that when they are not there, why, I suffer—I don't know how to live at all. So be kinder to me, Celia!"

"I was kinder, as you call it, when you came in," she replied. "I told you to go away. That was pure kindness—more kindness than you deserved."

Theron looked at his hat, where it stood on the carpet by his feet. He felt tears coming into his eyes. "You tell me that you remember," he said in depressed tones, "and yet you treat me like this! Perhaps I am wrong. No doubt it is my own fault. I suppose I ought not to have come down here at all."

Celia nodded her head in assent to this view.

"But I swear that I was helpless in the matter," he

burst forth. "I *had* to come. It would have been literally impossible for me to have stayed at home, knowing that you were here, and knowing also that—that——"

"Go on," said Celia, thrusting forth her under lip a trifle, and hardening still further the gleam in her eye as he stumbled over his sentence and left it unfinished. "What was the other thing that you were 'knowing'?"

"Knowing"—he took up the word unhesitatingly—"knowing that life would be insupportable to me if I could not be near you."

She curled her lip at him. "You skated over the thin spot very well," she commented. "It was on the tip of your tongue to mention the fact that Father Forbes came with me. Oh, I can read you through and through, Mr. Ware."

In a misty way Theron felt things slipping from his grasp. The rising moisture blurred his eyes as their gaze clung to Celia.

"Then, if you do read me," he protested, "you must know how utterly my heart and brain are filled with you. No other man in all the world can yield himself so absolutely to the woman he worships as I can. You have taken possession of me so wholly, I am not in the least master of myself any more. I don't know what I say or what I do. I am not worthy of

you, I know. No man alive could be that. But no one else will idolise and reverence you as I do. Believe me when I say that, Celia! And how can you blame me in your heart for following you? 'Whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me!'"

Celia shrugged her shoulders and moved a few steps away from him. Something like despair seized upon him.

"Surely," he urged with passion—"surely I have a right to remind you of the kiss!"

She turned. "The kiss," she said meditatively. "Yes, you have a right to remind me of it. Oh yes, an undoubted right. You have another right, too—the right to have the kiss explained to you. It was of the good-bye order. It signified that we weren't to meet again, and that just for one little moment I permitted myself to be sorry for you. That was all."

He held himself erect under the incredible words, and gazed blankly at her. The magnitude of what he confronted bewildered him; his mind was incapable of taking it in. "You mean——" he started to say, and then stopped, helplessly staring into her face, with a

dropped jaw. It was too much to try to think what she meant.

A little side-thought sprouted in the confusion of his brain. It grew until it spread a bitter smile over his pale face. "I know so little about kisses," he said; "I am such a greenhorn at that sort of thing. You should have had pity on my inexperience, and told me just what brand of kiss it was I was getting. Probably I ought to have been able to distinguish, but, you see, I was brought up in the country—on a farm. They don't have kisses in assorted varieties there."

She bowed her head slightly. "Yes, you are entitled to say that," she assented. "I was to blame, and it is quite fair that you should tell me so. You spoke of your inexperience, your innocence. That was why I kissed you in saying good-bye. It was in memory of that innocence of yours, to which you yourself had been busy saying good-bye ever since I first saw you. The idea seemed to me to mean something at the moment. I see now that it was too subtle. I do not usually err on that side."

Theron kept his hold upon her gaze, as if it afforded him bodily support. He felt that he ought to stoop and take up his hat, but he dared not look away from her. "Do you not err now, on the side of cruelty?" he asked her piteously.

It seemed for the instant as if she were wavering,

and he swiftly thrust forth other pleas. "I admit that I did wrong to follow you to New York. I see that now. But it was an offence committed in entire good faith. Think of it, Celia! I have never seen you since that day—that day in the woods. I have waited, and waited, with no sign from you, no chance of seeing you at all. Think what that meant to me! Everything in the world had been altered for me—torn up by the roots. I was a new being, plunged into a new existence. The kiss had done that. But until I saw you again, I could not tell whether this vast change in me and my life was for good or for bad—whether the kiss had come to me as a blessing or a curse. The suspense was killing me, Celia! That is why, when I learned that you were coming here, I threw everything to the winds and followed you. You blame me for it, and I bow my head and accept the blame. But are you justified in punishing me so terribly—in going on after I have confessed my error, and cutting my heart into little strips, putting me to death by torture?"

"Sit down," said Celia, with a softened weariness in her voice. She seated herself in front of him as he sank into his chair again. "I don't want to give you unnecessary pain, but you have insisted on forcing yourself into a position where there isn't anything else but pain. I warned you to go away, but you wouldn't. No matter how gently I may try to explain things to you,

you are bound to get nothing but suffering out of the explanation. Now shall I still go on?"

He inclined his head in token of assent, and did not lift it again, but raised toward her a disconsolate gaze from a pallid, drooping face.

"It is all in a single word, Mr. Ware," she proceeded in low tones. "I speak for others as well as myself, mind you—we find that you are a bore."

Theron's stiffened countenance remained immovable. He continued to stare unblinkingly up into her eyes.

"We were disposed to like you very much when we first knew you," Celia went on. "You impressed us as an innocent, simple, genuine young character, full of mother's milk. It was like the smell of early spring in the country to come in contact with you. Your honesty of nature, your sincerity in that absurd religion of yours, your general *naïveté* of mental and spiritual get-up, all pleased us a great deal. We thought you were going to be a real acquisition."

"Just a moment—whom do you mean by 'we'?" He asked the question calmly enough, but in a voice with an effect of distance in it.

"It may not be necessary to enter into that," she replied. "Let me go on. But then it became apparent, little by little, that we had misjudged you. We liked you, as I have said, because you were unsophisticated, and delightfully fresh and natural. Somehow we took

it for granted you would stay so. But that is just what you didn't do—just what you hadn't the sense to try to do. Instead, we found you inflating yourself with all sorts of egotisms and vanities. We found you presuming upon the friendships which had been mistakenly extended to you. Do you want instances? You went to Dr. Ledsmar's house, that very day after I had been with you to get a piano at Thurston's, and tried to inveigle him into talking scandal about me. You came to me with tales about him. You went to Father Forbes, and sought to get him to gossip about us both. Neither of those men will ever ask you inside his house again. But that is only one part of it. Your whole mind became an unpleasant thing to contemplate. You thought it would amuse and impress us to hear you ridiculing and reviling the people of your church, whose money supports you, and making a mock of the things they believe in, and which you, for your life, wouldn't dare let them know you didn't believe in. You talked to us slightly about your wife. What were you thinking of, not to comprehend that that would disgust us? You showed me once—do you remember?—a Life of George Sand that you had just bought—bought because you had just discovered that she had an unclean side to her life. You chuckled as you spoke to me about it, and you were for all the world like a little nasty boy, giggling over something dirty that older people had

learned not to notice. These are merely random incidents. They are just samples, picked hap-hazard, of the things in you which have been opening our eyes, little by little, to our mistake. I can understand that all the while you really fancied that you were expanding, growing, in all directions. What you took to be improvement was degeneration. When you thought that you were impressing us most by your smart sayings and doings, you were reminding us most of the fable about the donkey trying to play lap-dog. And it wasn't even an honest, straightforward donkey at that!"

She uttered these last words sorrowfully, her hands clasped in her lap and her eyes sinking to the floor. A silence ensued. Then Theron reached a groping hand out for his hat, and rising, walked with a lifeless, automatic step to the door.

He had it half-open, when the impossibility of leaving in this way towered suddenly in his path and overwhelmed him. He slammed the door to, and turned as if he had been whirled round by some mighty wind. He came toward her, with something almost menacing in the vigour of his movements and in the wild look upon his white, set face. Halting before her, he covered the tailor-clad figure, the coiled red hair, the upturned face with its simulated calm, the big brown eyes, the rings upon the clasped fingers, with a sweeping, comprehensive glare of passion.

"This is what you have done to me, then!"

His voice was unrecognisable in his own ears—hoarse and broken, but with a fright-compelling something in it which stimulated his rage. The horrible notion of killing her, there where she sat, spread over the chaos of his mind with an effect of unearthly light—red and abnormally evil. It was like that first devilish radiance ushering in Creation, of which the first fruit was Cain. Why should he not kill her? In all ages, women had been slain for less. Yes—and men had been hanged. Something rose and stuck in his dry throat, and as he swallowed it down the sinister flare of murderous fascination died suddenly away into darkness. The world was all black again—plunged in the Egyptian night which lay upon the face of the deep while the earth was yet without form and void. He was alone on it—alone among awful, planetary solitudes which crushed him.

The sight of Celia, sitting motionless only a pace in front of him, was plain enough to his eyes. It was an illusion. She was really a star, many millions of miles away. These things were hard to understand, but they were true none the less. People seemed to be about him, but in fact he was alone. He recalled that even the little child in the car, playing with those two buttons on a string, would have nothing to do with him. Take his money—yes; take all he would give her, but not

smile at him, not come within reach of him! Men closed the doors of their houses against him. The universe held him at arms'-length as a nuisance.

He was standing with one knee upon a sofa. Unconsciously he had moved round to the side of Celia, and as he caught the effect of her face now in profile, memory-pictures began all at once building themselves in his brain—pictures of her standing in the darkened room of the cottage of death declaiming the *Confiteor*; of her seated at the piano, under the pure, mellowed candle-light; of her leaning her chin on her hands, and gazing meditatively at the leafy background of the woods they were in; of her lying back, indolently content, in the deck-chair on the yacht of his fancy—that yacht which a few hours before had seemed so brilliantly and bewitchingly real to him, and now—now!

He sank in a heap upon the couch, and burying his face among its cushions, wept and groaned aloud. His collapse was absolute. He sobbed with the abandonment of one who, in the veritable presence of death, lets go all sense of relation to life.

Presently someone was touching him on the shoulder—an incisive, pointed touch—and he checked himself, and lifted his face.

“You will have to get up and present some sort of an appearance, and go away at once,” Celia said to him

in low, rapid tones. "Some gentlemen are at the door whom I have been waiting for."

As he stupidly sat up and tried to collect his faculties Celia had opened the door and admitted two visitors. The foremost was Father Forbes, and he, with some whispered, smiling words, presented to her his companion, a tall, robust, florid man of middle age, with a frock-coat and a grey moustache, sharply waxed. The three spoke for a moment together. Then the priest's wandering eye suddenly lighted upon the figure on the sofa. He stared, knitted his brows, and then lifted them in inquiry as he turned to Celia.

"Poor man!" she said readily, in tones loud enough to reach Theron. "It is our neighbour, Father, the Rev. Mr. Ware. He hit upon my name in the register, quite unexpectedly, and I had him come up. He is in sore distress—a great and sudden bereavement. He is going now. Won't you speak to him in the hall—a few words, Father? It would please him. He is terribly depressed."

The words had drawn Theron to his feet as by some mechanical process. He took up his hat and moved dumbly to the door. It seemed to him that Celia intended offering to shake hands, but he went past her with only some confused exchange of glances and a murmured word or two. The tall stranger, who drew aside to let him pass, had acted as if he expected

to be introduced. Theron, emerging into the hall, leaned against the wall and looked dreamily at the priest, who had stepped out with him.

"I am very sorry to learn that you are in trouble, Mr. Ware," Father Forbes said, gently enough, but in hurried tones. "Miss Madden is also in trouble. I think I mentioned to you that her brother had got into a serious scrape. It might easily be made unpleasant for him and his family, but there is a hope that it can be hushed up. I have brought my old friend, General Brady, to consult with her about the matter. He knows all the parties concerned, and he can set things right if anybody can."

"It's a mistake about me—I'm not in any trouble at all," said Theron. "I just dropped in to make a friendly call."

The priest glanced sharply at him, noting with a swift, informed scrutiny how he sprawled against the wall, and what vacuity his eyes and loosened lips expressed.

"Then you have a talent for the inopportune amounting to positive genius," said Father Forbes, with a stormy smile.

"Tell me this, Father Forbes!" the other demanded, with impulsive suddenness, "is it true that you don't want me in your house again? Is that the truth or not?"

"The truth is always relative, Mr. Ware," replied the priest, turning away, and closing the door of the parlour behind him with a decisive sound.

Left alone, Theron started to make his way downstairs. He found his legs wavering under him and making zigzag movements of their own, in a bewildering fashion. He referred this at first, in an outburst of fresh despair, to the effects of his great grief. Then, as he held tight to the banister and governed his descent step by step, it occurred to him that it must be the wine he had had for breakfast. Upon examination, he was not so unhappy after all.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT the second peal of the door-bell Brother Soulsby sat up in bed. It was still pitch-dark, and the memory of the first ringing fluttered musically in his awakening consciousness as a part of some dream he had been having.

"Who the deuce can that be?" he mused aloud, in querulous resentment at the interruption.

"Put your head out of the window and ask," suggested his wife drowsily.

The bell-pull scraped violently in its socket, and a third outburst of shrill reverberations clamoured through the silent house.

"Whatever you do, I'd do it before he yanked the whole thing to pieces," added the wife, with more decision.

Brother Soulsby was wide awake now. He sprang to the floor, and groping about in the obscurity, began drawing on some of his clothes. He rapped on the window during the process to show that the house was astir, and a minute afterward made his way out of the

room and down the stairs, the boards creaking under his stockinged feet as he went.

Nearly a quarter of an hour passed before he returned. Sister Soulsby, lying in sleepy quiescence, heard vague sounds of voices at the front door, and did not feel interested enough to lift her head and listen. A noise of footsteps on the side-walk followed, first receding from the door, then coming toward it, this second time marking the presence of more than one person. There seemed in this the implication of a guest, and she shook off the dozing impulses which enveloped her faculties and waited to hear more. There came up, after further muttering of male voices, the undeniable chink of coins striking against one another; then more footsteps, the resonant slam of a carriage door out in the street, the grinding of wheels turning on the frosty road, and the racket of a vehicle and horses going off at a smart pace into the night. Somebody had come, then. She yawned at the thought, but remained well awake, tracing idly in her mind, as various slight sounds rose from the lower floor, the different things Soulsby was probably doing. Their spare room was down there, directly underneath; but, curiously enough, no one seemed to enter it. The faint murmur of conversation which from time to time reached her came from the parlour instead. At last she heard her husband's soft tread coming up the staircase, and still there had been no

hint of employing the guest-chamber. What could he be about? she wondered.

Brother Soulsby came in, bearing a small lamp in his hand, the reddish light of which, flaring upward, revealed an unlooked-for display of amusement on his thin, beardless face. He advanced to the bedside, shading the glare from her blinking eyes with his palm, and grinned.

"A thousand guesses, old lady," he said, with a dry chuckle, "and you wouldn't have a ghost of a chance. You might guess till Hades froze over seven feet thick, and still you wouldn't hit it."

She sat up in turn. "Good gracious, man," she began, "you don't mean—" Here the cheerful gleam in his small eyes reassured her, and she sighed relief, then smiled confusedly. "I half thought, just for the minute," she explained, "it might be some bounder who'd come east to try and black-mail me. But no, who is it—and what on earth have you done with him?"

Brother Soulsby cackled in merriment. "It's Brother Ware of Octavius, out on a little bat, all by himself. He says he's been on the loose only two days, but it looks more like a fortnight."

"*Our* Brother Ware?" She regarded him with open-eyed surprise.

"Well, yes, I suppose he's *our* Brother Ware—some,"

returned Soulsby genially. "He seems to think so, anyway."

"But tell me about it!" she urged eagerly. "What's the matter with him? How does he explain it?"

"Well, he explains it pretty badly, if you ask me," said Soulsby, with a droll, joking eye, and a mock-serious voice. He seated himself on the side of the bed, facing her, and still considerately shielding her eyes from the brightness of the light. "But don't think I suggested any explanations. I've been a mother myself. He's merely filled himself up to the neck with rum, in the simple, ordinary, good old-fashioned way — that's all. What is there to explain about that?"

She looked meditatively at him for a time, shaking her head. "No, Soulsby," she said gravely, at last; "this isn't any laughing matter. You may be sure something big has happened, to set him off like that. I'm going to get up and dress, right now. What time is it?"

"Now, don't you do anything of the sort," he urged persuasively. "It isn't five o'clock; it'll be dark for nearly an hour yet. Just you turn over and have another nap. He's all right. I put him on the sofa, with the buffalo robe round him. You'll find him there, safe and sound, when it's time for white folks to get up.

You know how it breaks you up all day to not get your full sleep."

"I don't care if it makes me look as old as the everlasting hills," she said. "Can't you understand, Soulsby! The thing worries me—gets on my nerves. I couldn't close an eye if I tried. I took a great fancy to that young man. I told you so at the time."

Soulsby nodded, and turned down the wick of his lamp a trifle. "Yes, I know you did," he remarked, in placidly non-contentious tones. "I can't say I saw so very much in him myself, but I daresay you're right." There followed a moment's silence, during which he experimented in turning the wick up again. "But anyway," he went on, "there isn't anything you can do. He'll sleep it off; and the longer he's left alone the better. It isn't at if we had a hired girl, who'd come down and find him there, and give the whole thing away. He's fixed up there perfectly comfortable, and when he's had his sleep out, and wakes up on his own account, he'll be feeling a heap better."

The argument might have carried conviction, but on the instant the sound of footsteps came to them from the room below. The subdued noise rose regularly, as of one pacing to and fro.

"No, Soulsby, *you* come back to bed and get *your* sleep out. I'm going down stairs. It's no good talking—I'm going!"

Brother Soulsby offered no further opposition, either by talk or demeanour, but returned contentedly to bed, pulling the comforter over his ears, and falling into the slow, measured respiration of tranquil slumber before his wife was ready to leave the room.

The dim cold grey of twilight was sifting furtively through the lace curtains of the front windows when Mrs. Soulsby, lamp in hand, entered the parlour. She confronted a figure she would have hardly recognised. The man seemed to have been submerged in a bath of disgrace. From the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, everything about him was altered, distorted, smeared with an intangible effect of shame. In the vague gloom of the middle distance between lamp and window, she noticed that his shoulders were crouched, like those of some shambling tramp; the frowzy shadows of a stubble beard lay on his jaw and throat; his clothes were crumpled and hung awry; his boots were stained with mud; the silk hat on the piano told its battered story with dumb eloquence.

Lifting the lamp, she moved forward a step, and threw its light upon his face. A little groan sounded involuntarily upon her lips. Out of a mask of unpleasant features, swollen with drink, and weighted by the physical craving for rest and sleep, there stared at her two blood-shot eyes, shining with the wild light of hysteria. The effect of dishevelled hair, relaxed muscles, and rough,

half-bearded lower face, lent to these eyes, as she caught their first glance, an unnatural glare. The lamp shook in her hand for an instant. Then, ashamed of herself, she held out her other hand fearlessly to him.

"Tell me all about it, Theron," she said calmly, and with a soothing, motherly intonation in her voice.

He did not take the hand she offered, but suddenly, with a wailing moan, cast himself on his knees at her feet. He was so tall a man that the movement could have no grace. He abased his head awkwardly, to bury it among the folds of the skirts at her ankles. She stood still for a moment, looking down upon him. Then blowing out the light, she reached over and set the smoking lamp on the piano near by. The daylight made things distinguishable in a wan, uncertain way throughout the room.

"I have come back out of hell, for the sake of hearing some human being speak to me like that!"

The thick utterance proceeded in a muffled fashion from where his face grovelled against her dress. Its despairing accents appealed to her; but even more was she touched by the ungainly figure he made, sprawling on the carpet.

"Well, since you are out, stay out!" she answered, as reassuringly as she could. "But get up, and take a

seat here beside me, like a sensible man, and tell me all about it. Come! I insist!"

In obedience to her tone, and the sharp tug at his shoulder with which she emphasised it, he got slowly to his feet, and listlessly seated himself on the sofa to which she pointed. He hung his head and began catching his breath with a periodical gasp, half-hiccough, half-sob.

"First of all," she said, in her brisk, matter-of-fact manner, "don't you want to lie down here again, and have me tuck you up snug with the buffalo robe, and go to sleep? That would be the very best thing you could do."

He shook his head disconsolately from side to side. "I can't!" he groaned, with a swifter recurrence of the sob-like convulsions. "I'm dying for sleep, but I'm too—too frightened!"

"Come, I'll sit beside you till you drop off," she said, with masterful decision. He suffered himself to be pushed into recumbency on the couch, and put his head with docility on the pillow she brought from the spare room. When she had spread the fur over him, and pushed her chair close to the sofa, she stood by it for a little, looking down in meditation at his demoralised face. Under the painful surface-blur of

wretchedness and fatigued debauchery, she traced reflectively the lineaments of the younger and cleaner countenance she had seen a few months before. Nothing essential had been taken away. There was only this pestiferous overlaying of shame and cowardice to be removed. The face underneath was still all right.

With a soft, maternal touch, she smoothed the hair from his forehead into order. Then she seated herself, and when he got his hand out from under the robe, and thrust it forth timidly, she took it in hers, and held it in a warm, sympathetic grasp. He closed his eyes at this, and gradually the paroxysmal catch in his breathing lapsed. The daylight strengthened, until at last tiny flecks of sunshine twinkled in the meshes of the further curtains at the window. She fancied him asleep, and gently sought to disengage her hand, but his fingers clutched at it with vehemence, and his eyes were wide open.

"I can't sleep at all," he murmured. "I want to talk."

"There's nothing in the world to hinder you," she commented smilingly.

"I tell you the solemn truth," he said, lifting his voice in dogged assertion, "the best sermon I ever preached in my life I preached only three weeks ago,

at the camp-meeting. It was admitted by everybody to be far and away my finest effort. They will tell you the same."

"It's quite likely," assented Sister Soulsby. "I quite believe it."

"Then how can anybody say that I've degenerated, that I've become a fool?" he demanded.

"I haven't heard anybody hint such a thing," she answered quietly.

"No, of course *you* haven't heard them!" he cried. "*I* heard them, though!" Then forcing himself to a sitting posture, against the restraint of her hand, he flung back the covering. "I'm burning hot already! Yes, those were the identical words: I haven't improved, I've degenerated. People hate me; they won't have me in their houses. They say I'm a nuisance and a bore; I'm like a little nasty boy—that's what they say. Even a young man who was dying—lying right on the edge of his open grave—told me solemnly that I reminded him of a saint once, but now I was only fit for a bar-keeper. They say I really don't know anything at all. And I'm not only a fool, they say; I'm a dishonest fool into the bargain!"

"But who says such twaddle as that?" she returned consolingly. The violence of his emotion disturbed

her. "You mustn't imagine such things. You are among friends here. Other people are your friends too; they have the very highest opinion of you."

"I haven't a friend on earth but you!" he declared solemnly. His eyes glowed fiercely, but his voice sank into a grave intensity of tone. "I was going to kill myself. I went on to the big bridge, to throw myself off, and a policeman saw me trying to climb over the railing, and he grabbed me and marched me away. Then he threw me out at the entrance, and said he would club my head off if I came there again. And then I went and stood and let the cable-cars pass close by me, and twenty times I thought I had the nerve to throw myself under the next one, and then I waited for the next—and—I was afraid. And then I was in a crowd somewhere, and the warning came to me that I was going to die. The fool needn't go kill himself. God would take care of that. It was my heart, you know. I've had that terrible fluttering once before. It seized me this time, and I fell down in the crowd, and some people walked over me; but some one else helped me up, and let me sit down in a big lighted hall-way, the entrance to some theatre, and someone brought me some brandy, but somebody else said I was drunk, and they took it away again, and put me out. They could see I was a fool, that I hadn't a friend on earth.

And when I went out, there was a big picture of a woman in tights, and the word 'Amazons' overhead—and then I remembered you. I knew *you* were my friend—the only one I have on earth."

"It is very flattering—to be remembered like that," said Sister Soulsby gently. The disposition to laugh was smothered by a pained perception of the suffering he was undergoing. His face had grown drawn and haggard under the burden of his memories as he rambled on.

"So I came straight to you," he began again; "I had just money enough left to pay my fare. The rest is in my valise at the hotel—the Murray Hill Hotel. It belongs to the church. I stole it from the church. When I am dead they can get it back again."

Sister Soulsby forced a smile to her lips. "What nonsense you talk—about dying!" she exclaimed. "Why, man alive, you'll sleep this all off, like a top, if you'll only lie down and give yourself a chance. Come now, you must do as you're told."

With a resolute hand she made him lie down again, and once more covered him with the fur. He submitted, and did not even offer to put out his arm this time, but looked in piteous dumbness at her for a long space. While she sat thus in silence the sound of Brother Soulsby moving about upstairs became audible.

Theron heard it, and the importance of hurrying on some further disclosure seemed to suggest itself. "I can see you think I'm just drunk," he said, in low, sombre tones. "Of course, that's what *he* thought. The hackman thought so, and so did the conductor, and everybody. But I hoped you would know better. I was sure you would see that it was something worse than that. See here, I'll tell you; then you'll understand. I've been drinking for two days and one whole night, on my feet all the while, wandering alone in that big, strange New York, going through places where they murdered men for ten cents, mixing myself up with the worst people in low bar-rooms and dance-houses, and they saw I had money in my pocket, too—and yet nobody touched me, or offered to lay a finger on me. Do you know why? They understood that I wanted to get drunk, and couldn't. The Indians won't harm an idiot, you know. Well, it was the same with these vilest of the vile. They saw that I was a fool whom God had taken hold of, to break his heart first, and then to craze his brain, and to fling him on a dunghill to die like a dog. They believe in God, those people. They're the only ones who do, it seems to me. And they wouldn't interfere when they saw what He was doing to me. But I tell you I wasn't drunk. I haven't been drunk. I'm only heart-broken, and crushed out

of shape and life—that's all. And I've crawled here just to have a friend by me when—when I come to the end."

"You're not talking very sensibly, or very bravely either, Theron," remarked his companion. "It's cowardly to give way to notions like that."

"Oh, I'm not afraid to die—don't think that," he remonstrated wearily. "If there is a judgment, it has hit me as hard as it can already. There can't be any hell worse than that I've gone through. Here I am, talking about hell," he continued, with a pained contraction of the muscles about his mouth—a still-born, malformed smile—"as if I believed in one! I've got way through all my beliefs, you know. I tell you that, frankly."

"It's none of my business," she reassured him. "I'm not your Bishop or your confessor. I'm just your friend, your pal—that's all."

"Look here!" he broke in, with some animation, and a new intensity of glance and voice. "If I was going to live, I'd have some funny things to tell. Six months ago I was a good man. I not only seemed to be good, to others and to myself, but I *was* good. I had a soul; I had a conscience. I was going along doing my duty, and I was happy in it. We were poor, Alice and I, and people behaved rather hard toward us, and sometimes we were a little down in the mouth

about it, but that was all. We really were happy, and I—I really was a good man. Here's the kind of joke God plays! You see me here, six months after. Look at me! I haven't got an honest hair in my head. I'm a bad man through and through—that's what I am. I look all around at myself, and there isn't an atom left anywhere of the good man I used to be. And mind you, I never lifted a finger to prevent the change. I didn't resist once; I didn't make any fight. I just walked deliberately down hill, with my eyes wide open. I told myself all the while that I was climbing up hill instead, but I knew in my heart that it was a lie. Everything about me was a lie. I wouldn't be telling the truth even now, if—if I hadn't come to the end of my rope. Now, how do you explain that? How *can* it be explained? Was I really rotten to the core all the time, years ago, when I seemed to everybody, myself and the rest, to be good and straight and sincere? Was it all a sham, or does God take a good man and turn him into an out-and-out bad one, in just a few months—in the time that it takes an ear of corn to form and ripen and go off with the mildew? Or isn't there any God at all—but only men who live and die like animals? And that would explain my case, wouldn't it? I got bitten, and went vicious and crazy, and they've had to chase me out and hunt me to my death

like a mad dog! Yes, that makes it all very simple. It isn't worth while to discuss me at all, as if I had a soul. I'm just one more mongrel cur that's gone mad, and must be put out of the way—that's all."

"See here!" said Sister Soulsby alertly, "I half believe that a good cuffing is what you really stand in need of. Now you stop all this nonsense, and lie quiet and keep still! Do you hear me?"

The jocose sternness which she assumed, in words and manner, seemed to soothe him. He almost smiled up at her, in a melancholy way, and sighed profoundly.

"I've told you *my* religion before," she went on with gentleness. "The sheep and the goats are to be separated on Judgment Day, but not a minute sooner. In other words, as long as human life lasts, good, bad, and indifferent are all braided up together in every man's nature, and every woman's too. You weren't altogether good a year ago, any more than you're altogether bad now. You were some of both then; you're some of both now. If you've been making an extra sort of fool of yourself lately, why, now that you recognise it, the only thing to do is to slow steam, pull up, and back-engine in the other direction. In that way you'll find things will even themselves up. It's a

see-saw with all of us, my friend—sometimes up, sometimes down. But nobody is rotten clear to the core.”

He closed his eyes, and lay in silence for a time.

“This is what day of the week?” he asked at last.

“Friday, the nineteenth.”

“Wednesday—that would be the seventeenth. That was the day ordained for my slaughter. On that morning I was the happiest man in the world. No king could have been so proud and confident as I was. A wonderful romance had come to me. The most beautiful young woman in the world, the most talented too, was waiting for me. An express train was carrying me to her, and it couldn’t go fast enough to keep up with my eagerness. She was very rich, and she loved me, and we were to live in eternal summer, wherever we liked, on a big, beautiful yacht. No one else had such a life before him as that. It seemed almost too good for me, but I thought I had grown and developed so much that perhaps I would be worthy of it. Oh, how happy I was! I tell you this because—because *you* are not like the others. You will understand.”

“Yes, I understand,” she said patiently. “Well, you were being so happy——”

“That was in the morning, Wednesday the seventeenth—early in the morning. There was a little girl

in the car, playing with some buttons, and when I tried to make friends with her, she looked at me, and she saw, right at a glance, that I was a fool. 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,' you know. She was the first to find it out. It began like that, early in the morning. But then after that, everybody knew it. They had only to look at me and they said: 'Why, this is a fool—like a little nasty boy. We won't let him into our house, we find him a bore.' That is what they said."

"Did *she* say it?" Sister Soulsby permitted herself to ask.

For answer Theron bit his lips, and drew his chin under the fur, and pushed his scowling face into the pillow. The spasmodic, sob-like gasps began to shake him again. She laid a compassionate hand upon his hot brow.

"That is why I made my way here to you," he groaned piteously. "I knew you would sympathise—I could tell it all to you. And it was so awful to die there alone in the strange city—I couldn't do it—with nobody near me who liked me or thought well of me. Alice would hate me. There was no one but you. I wanted to be with you—at the last."

His quavering voice broke off in a gust of weeping, and his face frankly surrendered itself to the distortions

of a crying child's countenance, wide-mouthed and tragically grotesque in its abandonment of control.

Sister Soulsby, as her husband's boots were heard descending the stairs, rose, and drew the robe up to half cover his agonised visage. She patted the sufferer softly on the head, and then went to the stair-door.

"I think he'll go to sleep now," she said, lifting her voice to the new-comer, and with a backward nod toward the couch. "Come out into the kitchen while I get breakfast, or into the sitting-room, or somewhere, so as not to disturb him. He's promised me to lie perfectly quiet and try to sleep."

When they had passed together out of the room, she turned. "Soulsby," she said, with half-playful asperity, "I'm disappointed in you. For a man who's knocked about as much as you have, I must say you've picked up an astonishingly small outfit of gumption. That poor creature in there is no more drunk than I am. He's been drinking, yes, drinking like a fish, but it wasn't able to make him drunk. He's past being drunk, he's grief-crazy. It's a case of 'woman.' Some girl has made a fool of him, and decoyed him up in a balloon, and let him drop. He's been hurt bad, too."

"We have all been hurt in our day and generation," responded Brother Soulsby genially. "Don't you worry;

he'll sleep that off, too. It takes longer than drink, and it doesn't begin to be so pleasant, but it can be slept off. Take my word for it, he'll be a different man by noon."

When noon came, however, Brother Soulsby was on his way to summon one of the village doctors. Toward nightfall he went out again, to telegraph for Alice.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SPRING fell early upon the pleasant southern slopes of the Susquehanna country. The snow went off as by magic. The trees budded and leaved before their time. The birds came and set up their chorus in the elms, while winter seemed still a thing of yesterday.

Alice, clad gravely in black, stood again upon a kitchen-stoop, and looked across an intervening space of backyards and fences to where the tall boughs, fresh in their new verdure, were silhouetted against the pure blue sky. The prospect recalled to her irresistibly another sunlit morning, a year ago, when she had stood in the doorway of her own kitchen, and surveyed a scene not unlike this—it might have been with the same carolling robins, the same trees, the same azure segment of the tranquil, speckless dome. Then she was looking out upon surroundings novel and strange to her, among which she must make herself at home as best she could. But at least the ground was secure under her feet; at least she had a home, and a word from her lips could summon her husband out, to stand beside her with his

arm about her, and share her buoyant, hopeful joy in the promises of spring.

To think that that was only one little year ago—the mere revolution of four brief seasons! And now——

Sister Soulsby, wiping her hands on her apron, came briskly out upon the stoop. Some cheerful commonplace was on her tongue, but a glance at Alice's wistful face kept it back. She passed an arm around her waist instead, and stood in silence, looking at the elms.

"It brings back memories to me, all this," said Alice, nodding her head, and not seeking to dissemble the tears which sprang to her eyes.

"The men will be down in a minute, dear," the other reminded her. "They'd nearly finished packing before I put the biscuits in the oven. We mustn't wear long faces before folks, you know."

"Yes, I know," murmured Alice. Then, with a sudden impulse, she turned to her companion. "Candace," she said fervently, "we're alone here for the moment. I must tell you that if I don't talk gratitude to you, it's simply and solely because I don't know where to begin or what to say. I'm just dumbfounded at your goodness. It takes my speech away. I only know this, Candace—God will be very good to you."

"Tut-tut!" replied Sister Soulsby; "that's all right,

you dear thing. I know just how you feel. Don't dream of being under obligation to explain it to me, or to thank us at all. We've had all sorts of comfort out of the thing, Soulsby and I. We used to get downright lonesome here all by ourselves, and we've simply had a winter of pleasant company instead, that's all. Besides, there's solid satisfaction in knowing that at last, for once in our lives, we've had a chance to be of some real use to somebody who truly needed it. You can't imagine how stuck-up that makes us in our own conceit. We feel as if we were George Peabody and Lady Burdett-Coutts, and several other philanthropists thrown in. No, seriously, don't think of it again. We're glad to have been able to do it all; and if you only go ahead now, and prosper and be happy, why that will be the only reward we want."

"I hope we shall do well," said Alice. "Only tell me this, Candace—you do think I was right, don't you, in insisting on Theron's leaving the ministry altogether? He seems convinced enough now that it was the right thing to do; but I grow nervous sometimes lest he should find it harder than he thought to get along in business, and regret the change, and blame me."

"I think you may rest easy in your mind about that," the other responded. "Whatever else he does, he will never want to come within gunshot of a pulpit again. It came too near murdering him for that."

Alice looked at her doubtfully. "*Something* came near murdering him, I know. But it doesn't seem to me that I would say it was the ministry. And I guess you know pretty well yourself what it was. Of course, I've never asked any questions, and I've hushed up everybody at Octavius who tried to quiz me about it—his disappearance, and my packing up and leaving, and all that—and I've never discussed the question with you; but——"

"No, and there's no good going into it now," put in Sister Soulsby, with amiable decisiveness. "It's all past and gone. In fact, I hardly remember much about it now myself. He simply got into deep water, poor soul, and we've fished him out again safe and sound—that's all. But all the same, I was right in what I said—he was a mistake in the ministry."

"But if you'd known him in previous years," urged Alice plaintively, "before we were sent to that awful Octavius! He was the very ideal of all a young minister should be. People used to simply worship him, he was such a perfect preacher, and so pure-minded and friendly with everybody, and threw himself into his work so. It was all that miserable, contemptible Octavius that did the mischief."

Sister Soulsby slowly shook her head.

"If there hadn't been a screw loose somewhere," she said gently, "Octavius wouldn't have hurt him."

No, take my word for it, he never was the right man for the place. He seemed to be, no doubt; but he wasn't. When pressure was put on him, it found out his weak spot like a shot, and pushed on it, and—well, it came near smashing him—that's all."

"And do you think he'll always be a—a backslider?" mourned Alice.

"For mercy's sake, don't ever try to have him pretend to be anything else!" exclaimed the other. "The last state of that man would be worse than the first. You must make up your mind to that. And you mustn't show that you're nervous about it. You mustn't *get* nervous. You mustn't be afraid of things. Just you keep a stiff upper lip, and say you *will* get along, you *will* be happy! That's your only chance, Alice. He isn't going to be an angel of light, or a saint, or anything of that sort, and it's no good expecting it. But he'll be just an average kind of man—a little sore about some things, a little wiser than he was about some others. You can get along perfectly with him if you only keep your courage up and don't show the white feather."

"Yes, I know; but I've had it pretty well taken out of me," commented Alice. "It used to come easy to me to be cheerful and resolute, and all that; but it's different now."

Sister Soulsby stole a swift glance at the unsuspecting face of her companion, which was not all admiration; but her voice remained patiently affectionate. "Oh, that'll all come back to you right enough. You'll have your hands full, you know, finding a house, and unpacking all your old furniture, and buying new things, and getting your home settled. It'll keep you so busy you won't have time to feel strange or lonesome one bit. You'll see how it'll tone you up. In a year's time you won't know yourself in the looking-glass."

"Oh, my health is good enough," said Alice; "but I can't help thinking, suppose Theron should be taken sick again, away out there among strangers. You know he's never appeared to me to have quite got his strength back. These long illnesses, you know, they always leave a mark on a man."

"Nonsense! He's as strong as an ox," insisted Sister Soulsby. "You mark my word, he'll thrive in Seattle like a green bay tree."

"Se-attle!" echoed Alice meditatively. "It *sounds* like the other end of the world, doesn't it!"

The noise of feet in the house broke upon the colloquy, and the women went indoors, to join the breakfast party. During the meal it was Brother Soulsby who bore the burden of the conversation. He was full of the future of Seattle, and the magnificent impending

development of that whole section. He had been out there years ago, when it was next door to uninhabited. He had visited the district twice since, and the changes discoverable each new time were more wonderful than anything Aladdin's lamp ever wrought. He had secured for Theron, through some of his friends in Portland, the superintendency of a land and real estate company, which had its headquarters in Seattle, but ambitiously linked its affairs with the future of all Washington Territory. In an hour's time the hack would come to take the Wares and their baggage to the dépôt, the first stage in their long journey across the continent to their new home. Brother Soulsby amiably filled the interval with reminiscences of the Oregon of twenty years back, with instructive dissertations upon the soil, climate, and seasons of Puget Sound and the Columbia valley, and, above all, with helpful characterisations of the social life which had begun to take form in this remotest West. He had nothing but confidence, to all appearances, in the success of his young friend now embarking on this new career. He seemed so sanguine about it that the whole atmosphere of the breakfast-room lightened up, and the parting meal, surrounded by so many temptations to distraught broodings and silences as it was, became almost jovial in its spirit.

At last it was time to look for the carriage. The trunks and handbags were ready in the hall, and Sister

Soulsby was tying up a package of sandwiches for Alice to keep by her in the train.

Theron, with hat in hand and overcoat on arm, loitered restlessly into the kitchen, and watched this proceeding for a moment. Then he sauntered out upon the stoop, and lifting his head and drawing as long a breath as he could, looked over at the elms.

Perhaps the face was older and graver; it was hard to tell. The long winter's illness, with its recurring crises and sustained confinement, had bleached his skin and reduced his figure to gauntness, but there was none the less an air of restored and secure good health about him. Only in the eyes themselves, as they rested briefly upon the prospect, did a substantial change suggest itself. They did not dwell fondly upon the picture of the lofty spreading boughs, with their waves of sap-green leafage stirring against the blue. They did not soften and glow this time at the thought of how wholly one felt sure of God's goodness in these wonderful new mornings of spring.

They looked instead straight through the fairest and most moving spectacle in Nature's processional, and saw afar off, in conjectural vision, a formless sort of place which was Seattle. They surveyed its impalpable outlines, its undefined dimensions, with a certain cool glitter of hard-and-fast resolve. There rose before his

fancy, out of the chaos of these shapeless imaginings, some faces of men, then more behind them, then a great concourse of uplifted countenances, crowded close together as far as the eye could reach. They were attentive faces all—rapt, eager, credulous to a degree. Their eyes were admiringly bent upon a common object of excited interest. They were looking at *him*; they strained their ears to miss no cadence of his voice. Involuntarily he straightened himself, stretched forth his hand, with the pale, thin fingers gracefully disposed, and passed it slowly before him from side to side in a comprehensive, stately gesture. The audience rose at him as he dropped his hand, and filled his day-dream with a mighty roar of applause, in volume like an ocean tempest, yet pitched for his hearing alone.

He smiled, shook himself with a little delighted tremor, and turned on the stoop to the open door.

“What Soulsby said about politics out there interested me enormously,” he remarked to the two women. “I shouldn’t be surprised if I found myself doing something in that line. I *can* speak, you know, if I can’t do anything else. Talk is what tells these days. Who knows? I may turn up in Washington a full-blown Senator before I’m forty. Stranger things have happened than that out West!”

“We’ll come down and visit you then, Soulsby and

I," said Sister Soulsby cheerfully. "You shall take us to the White House, Alice, and introduce us."

"Oh, it isn't likely *I* would ever come East," said Alice pensively. "Most probably I'd be left to amuse myself in Seattle. But there, I think that's the carriage driving up to the door."

THE END.

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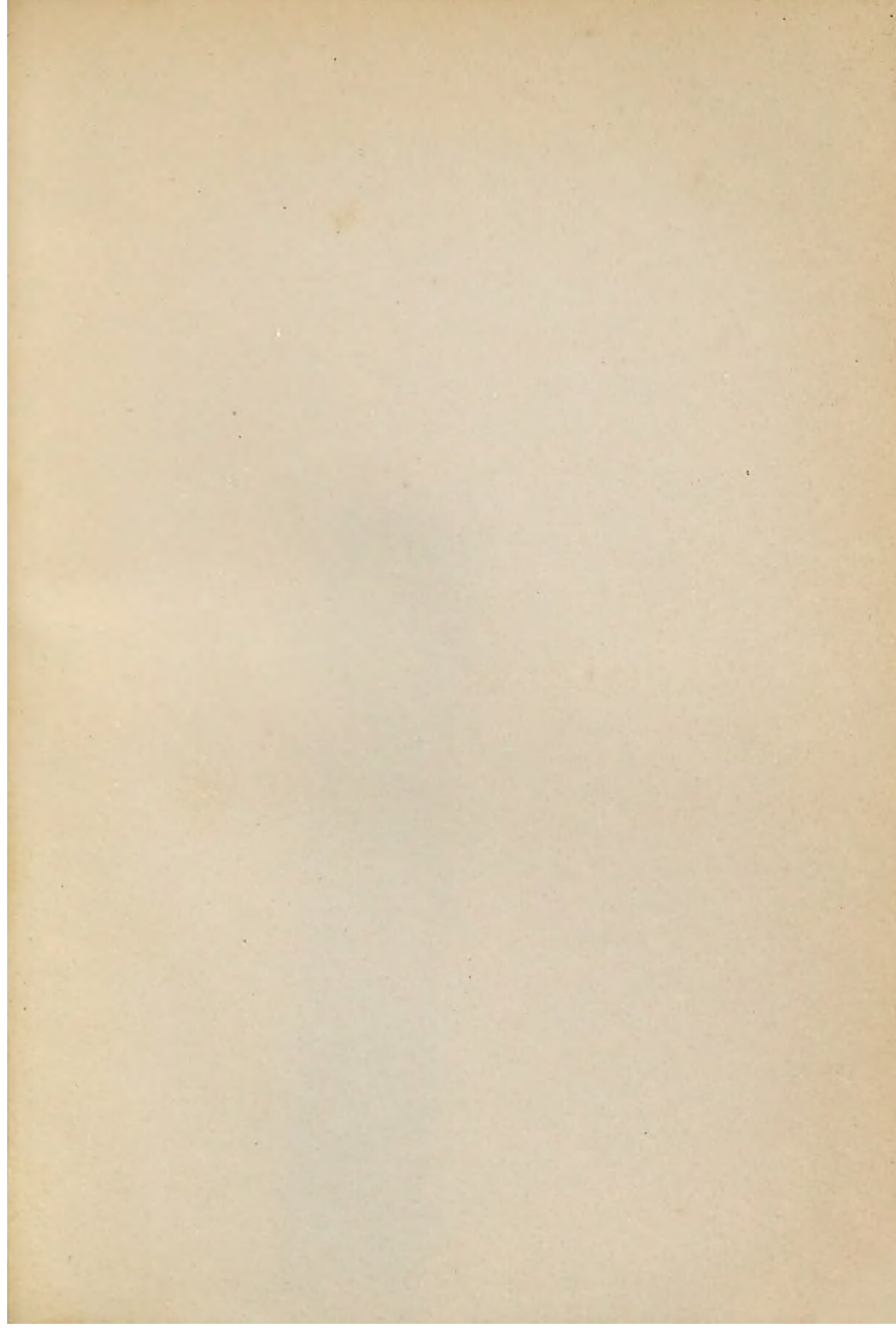
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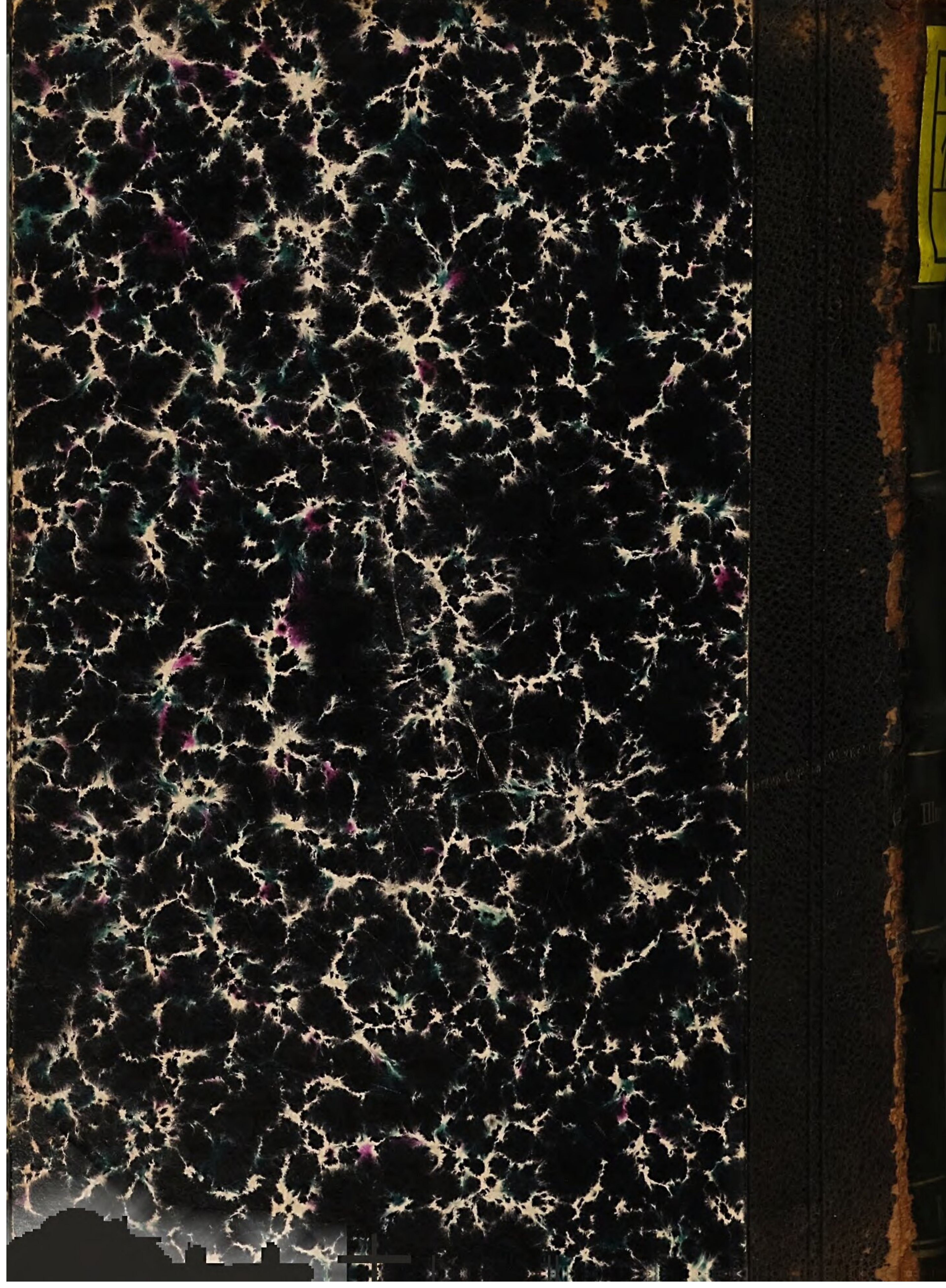
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